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THE DOCTOR DETECTIVE; OR, THE MYSTERY OF THE GOLDEN COFFIN.

A STRANGE STORY OF HIDDEN, INNER LIFE OF NEW YORK'S GREAT CITY.

BY GEORGE LEMUEL.



"IN THE GOLDEN COFFIN YOU WILL BE BURIED ALIVE THERE!" EXCLAIMED THE MASTER-SPIRIT, POINTING WITH OUTSTRETCHED FINGER INTO THE HORRIBLE VOID.

The Doctor Detective;

OR,

The Mystery of the Golden Coffin.

BY GEORGE LEMUEL.

CHAPTER I.

DOCTOR DIAMOND.

"Our acts our angels are."

"SAY, boss, be you the doctor?"

The hour was ten of the night; the city, New York; the locality, that old-fashioned section of the great metropolis situated on the west side of the town, the district which extends from Spring street to Fourteenth, once the chosen home of the fashionables of Gotham, but now devoted to second-rate boarding-houses, modest homes of thriving tradesmen, and, in some parts, to that hideous excrescence which disfigures New York above all other cities in America—the tenement-house, which contains within its narrow limits enough people to form a small village, or, as some one of the Health Officers wisely and concisely stated the other day in a public journal—"More people live in these unhealthy habitations than can find graves in the earth that the house and yard cover."

We will not name the exact street, for in our narrative such painful truths must be told, that it would not do to tear the veil away altogether and expose the hideous thing in all its wretchedness.

But let him of the inquiring mind stand upon the platform of the L road at Fourteenth street, and a common old-fashioned musket would carry a ball right into the locality.

The speaker was a stout little urchin, a dozen years old, perhaps, with a sharp, shrewd face, old beyond his years, as all the street boys of large cities naturally are, for the life they lead is a forcing one and develops them rapidly. The boy was habited in a ragged suit, a deal too big for him, and it was so tattered and torn that it really was wonderful how it came to stay on the body at all.

The man to whom the remark was addressed was just descending the steps of a modest two-storied brick house, of which the street was mainly composed, and which bore upon its front a small tin sign, which read:

"DOCTOR DIAMOND."

And the man was the doctor in person, a rather tall, peculiar-looking personage, with one of those remarkable faces which, once seen, are not easily forgotten; the long, oval face, common to the men of the south-west, the big-boned settlers of the banks of the lower Ohio and Mississippi; high cheek-bones, something after the Scotch pattern; full blue eyes, with an habitual sad look to them; a pale face fringed with long, dark-brown hair, which he wore "clubbed" over his ears, after the western fashion. He was dressed plainly, almost poorly, in a complete suit of black, which, from its peculiar cut, gave him quite a clerical look.

"Yes, I am the doctor; does any one require my services?" he demanded, surveying the boy, whose only attire consisted of a big pair of pantaloons and an enormous coat, which, tightly buttoned at the neck, descended to his heels.

"You bet, hoss-fly!" sung out the lad, after the manner of his guild. "Come along, walk your chinks, for day's a-breakin'!"

The boy started off on a dog-trot down the street, and the doctor, who, thanks to his stature, was a rapid walker, easily kept up with him.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Hell's Kitchen!"

The doctor knew the locality well enough; a miserable little court, close to the water-side, inhabited by the poorest of the poor, and which, in some way, had received the above-given expressive title. Low indeed in the social scale must be the poor wretch forced by cruel fortune to dwell within its gloomy precincts. The houses were so close together that the blessed light of the health-giving sun never rested upon the pavement of the court. It was almost as dark and desolate as some of the great Western canyons that adventuring explorers tell us about, with walls of regular rocks a mile high on either side, and where, in the middle even of the hottest summer, ice may be found.

"What is the matter with the party?" The doctor expected that his services were needed to patch up the wounds received in some drunken brawl, such as were only too common within the limits of this court.

"Going to make a die of it, I guess," the boy answered, with that reckless disregard for pain and death which the savage life of the streets so soon implants in the breast of youth.

"Hurt in some quarrel?"

"Not much! It's a gal."

"A girl?"

"Well, an old gal, and I guess that she's got to climb the golden stairs; I don't think that you kin do her much good, anyway," the boy

continued, with the generous confidence of youth, "but I thought as how it might do the young one some good to kinder see you fooling round—make her feel better, you know."

"An old woman and her daughter?"

"Keno, correct! Set 'em up ag'in!"

"And the old lady is very ill?"

"Another ten-strike!" exclaimed the boy, admiringly. "I tell you, a feller don't have to beat things into your head with a club."

"The young lady is the daughter of the old lady, I presume?"

"I presume," repeated the boy, whose fancy was tickled by the phrase; "spit 'em out! Swallowed a dictionary some time, I reckon. Well, to get right down to business, the young gal is the darter of the old 'un, and she is a lady, too, you can bet your boots on that, every time; but they're drefful poor; old gal sick, young gal takes care on her and don't put in much time to work, but the old lady will pull for the silver shore to-night, I guess, and then what in blazes is to become of the little one is a conundrum that any man kin break his back over."

The boy was evidently a character, and the doctor's always-sad face grew sadder still as he listened to his talk—the strange jumble of childish prattle, innocent ignorance and vile slang—the argot of the street, that hideous modern monster who defiles all the young lives intrusted to its care.

"Say, Doc, you can't get rich outen this job, you know!" ejaculated the boy, abruptly, as they neared the entrance of the court. "You won't have to hire an express-wagon to carry your ducats away. The fact is—honest now, for I ain't on the beat—I s'pect that I'll have to 'hang you up' for this little racket, for I am about clean 'busted, jest now, and I guess the little gal ain't got money enough in the house to start a bank with. You see, she ain't got nary an idee that I've gone arter you, but when I saw that the old 'un had got a good, square knockdown, and that it was Wall street to a Florida orange that she wouldn't be able to toe the scratch and come to time ag'in, I made up my mind, as a friend of the family, that we ought to have a saw-bones jest for the looks of the thing, anyway, and as I allers heered of you as being a good sort of a chap w'at didn't skin poor people of their hide and taller, I thought I'd gi'n you the job. Make it light though, boss, and I'll square it with you some time, honor bright! You kin ask anybody in the court 'bout me. I've lived here ever since I was a little shaver, knee-high to a bull-frog; they all know me; jest ask for Hoppergrass."

"Hoppergrass! Is that your name?"

"Well, it does for me; I s'pect that I used to have a reg'lar name once, but it's so long ago that everybody has forgotten."

And the little fellow shook his head mournfully as though thinking of a dead and gone past that expired years and years ago.

"Don't trouble yourself about my fee; I am rich enough to give an hour or two to the suffering poor and I shall not count the time wasted."

"Bully for you! You will do in a crowd! Say, Doc!" cried the boy, confidentially, as he led the way into a most miserable abode, "jes' bulldoze the gal inter eating something. Blest if I believe she has taken anything all day!"

The boy knocked at a door at the rear end of the entry: a low, sweet voice within bade them enter, and they did so.

The apartment was a small one, barely twelve feet square and almost destitute of furniture, containing only a bed, a small table, upon which flickered a tallow candle, and a single chair.

Upon the bed lay an aged woman, evidently in the last stages of life, with her eyes closed and breathing so feebly that at first even the experienced eyes of the medical man believed that death had set in, but a second glance showed him that the dark angel had not yet claimed his prize, although he had placed his seal upon the victim.

Two glances at the invalid and then one at the daughter.

Oh, rapture! Never had Alcenor Diamond looked upon a fairer creature. In a moment the squalid apartment, the dying woman, the ape-like boy, all were forgotten in the contemplation of as fair a creature as Heaven ever had permitted to exist upon earth.

She was about the medium size, and with a form as perfect as though Nature, jealous of the sculptor's art, had resolved to create a human form so perfect that imitating mortals would give up their calling in despair of ever being able to reproduce its like. Her face was purely Greek in its outline, a type of the lineage that gave a Helen of Troy to earth to set the world at arms. Brown was her hair and brown her eyes—both perfect, both inexpressibly lovely.

And as the sad and silent student looked upon this beautiful creature, for the first time in his life he knew the meaning of the word love.

Say not, ye sages, wise and calm, that passion needs time to grow; it is false—the record of ages proves that love, heaven-born, often springs into being in an instant!

And the girl, too—Dura Eldon—whose life had been one long struggle against a cruel

tyrant—who had fled into these miserable quarters to escape him, for the first time since the breath of life had dwelt within her perfect form, understood what it was to feel the thrill of passion's fires within her veins. Here was a man whom she could love!

Oh, if he had only crossed her path one short half-hour ago, what a difference it would have made in her life! But now, she was separated as fully and completely from him—the only man upon whose face she had ever cared for a second time to look—as if an ocean rolled between them!

It was too late, and she was bound in a chain seemingly of silk, but in reality of iron, which would surely gall her to the grave.

The girl, stronger than the man, as women in affairs of the heart are always stronger than men, was the first to wake from the dangerous spell which was stealing over them.

"My mother!" she exclaimed, lowering her eyes and casting them toward the wasted form of her parent; "she can be saved, can she not, doctor, if she has proper care, food and medicine?"

Diamond approached the bed and made a rapid examination of the sufferer.

"Miss, to tell you a falsehood now would be cruel," he said, slowly, "and I cannot bring myself to do it. Your mother is already dying; within one hour she will breathe her last."

"Oh, my God!" cried the girl, springing to her feet in anguish. "It cannot be true. See, I have plenty of money," and she tore a large roll of bank-bills from her bosom, "I can buy her everything."

"But alas! all the gold in this world will not save her!"

"Then I have sold myself for naught!" she cried, despairingly, and fainted dead away.

The doctor at once proceeded to attend to the stricken girl, and under his care the girl soon revived, but she seemed transformed into a living statue; her face was like marble; she looked around her vacantly for a moment; then, catching sight of the pale face of the doctor, the memory of what he had said came back to her, and she shivered like one exposed to a sudden, chilling blast. A sigh came from her lips; with slow and feeble footsteps, as though shod with lead, she took her chair and moved it still closer to the bed; then, seating herself, she fixed her eyes, staringly, upon the face of the dying woman, and so she remained, taking no heed whatever of the presence of any one else in the room.

The doctor and the street lad—the strong man and the merry, careless boy—were both awed by this exhibition of silent despair, more terrible by far than the wildest grief; and almost as motionless as statues they, too, watched.

Ten, twenty, thirty minutes passed; then the experienced eyes of the medical man detected that the end was at hand.

The sick woman opened her eyes and gazed up in the eager face of the anxious daughter, first with a vacant look as though she recognized her not, but the stare faded into a smile of recognition, which played fitfully upon the wan, thin, bloodless lips.

"Dura, I am better now—I think that I shall soon—soon go to sleep—sleep," she murmured faintly, and wearily closed her eyes.

"You were wrong, doctor!" exclaimed the girl, softly; "man's skill cannot always foretell the workings of Providence. Oh, I was sure that the God who rules this world so wisely and well would not take from me the only friend I have in this wide world! For her sake I can bear the burden which I this night have taken upon my shoulders, and which almost makes life unsupportable, but I will bear it, and bear it bravely, if only for her. From this sleep she will wake refreshed, will she not, doctor? She will be stronger, and then, under your care, and with my ministering aid, day by day she will improve. Thank Heaven that I had strength to make the sacrifice, and now money is no object to me; gold will be but as a feather in the balance when compared to the restoration of this dear mother to health!"

"Miss Dura, prepare yourself for the worst!" the doctor replied, solemnly and sadly.

"The worst! In Heaven's name, what is it you mean?" cried the girl, her eyes frenzied and her breath coming quick and hard.

"Your mother will never wake again. She sleeps—sleeps in death."

A look of utter despair came over the beautiful face of the orphan, for such in truth she now was; the doctor advanced to her aid, for he feared that she was about to faint, but with a slow motion of her hand she waved him back. Then, bending over the bed, she imprinted a kiss upon the lips which were already becoming cold.

"Leave me," she murmured, as she pressed herself close to the senseless form of the mother whom she had once loved oh, so well, "leave me alone with my dead!"

There was no gainsaying such a request, and with noiseless steps the man and the lad withdrew from the room.

"I will come to-morrow; if I am wanted before come for me," Diamond said, as he departed.

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER SUMMONS.

THE doctor returned at once to his home and seated himself in his little parlor, his face gloomy with thought. Again he was alone—alone, and with wild ideas whirling through his brain.

For a good twenty minutes he sat, never stirring, his gaze fixed vacantly on the floor, his head drooping upon his breast.

It would have baffled the keenest reader of the human face to have guessed from his impassive features the thoughts which were passing through his mind.

A sharp ring of the door-bell disturbed his meditations.

With a sigh he rose to his feet; he was in no mood to go out into the world; he had no heart to mingle with busy life; rather would he have remained quiet and communed with the dead, in thought and spirit, if not in reality.

But from the sharpness of the ring he guessed it was a professional call; some sufferer desired his services, and in haste, too.

A rough-looking man was at the door—a big, brawny fellow, who looked like a 'longshoreman.

"Are you the doctor?" he asked, hurriedly, when Diamond answered the summons.

"Yes."

"Well, you're wanted, right away; there's a mate of mine took mighty sick; acts jest as if he had been p'isoned. He's been cruising along the shore, and come out to the sloop chock full; we put him in his bunk all right, but now he's jest howlin' in agony, and me and the capt'n kinder got it into our heads that some of the land-sharks have been a-dosing him, jest to go through him, you know."

"Where is he?"

"In the sloop out in the stream. We came down from Albany with a load of lumber this afternoon, and we hauled up for supplies. We're bound for Port Jefferson, Long Island; the Sarah Jane Hammond is the name of our craft."

"Very well; I will go at once."

"An' fetch some medicine along, Cap, for I tell yer he's jest sweating away like a steam-engine."

"I have a small medicine-case in my pocket, I never go out without it."

"Come along, then; the boat is right down at the dock, foot of the street; Jim is in it, waiting for me, while the capt'n is taking care of the cuss. Oh, I tell you! he is powerful bad!"

The doctor took his hat and departed with the sailor, hurrying along with him as if it was a case of life and death, although, in his own mind, he did not believe there was much of any danger. The stranger had simply taken some worse liquor than he had been accustomed to, and it had made him sick.

There was no moon; the bright, twinkling stars alone lit up the sky; the dock at the foot of the street was very dark and gloomy when the two left the light of the river street behind them and walked out on the pier.

The waves rose and fell with that regular swash against the piles of the wharf, which always sounds so melancholy by night.

"Thar's the sloop!" said the sailor, pointing to where a light cut the darkness out in the middle of the stream, "and here's the boat," he continued, going toward a pair of steps by the side of the pier, leading down to the water.

Through the dense gloom of the night, Diamond could distinguish that there was a boat, containing a single man, rocking in the water at the bottom of the steps. He followed the sailor down, was warned to "mind your eye!" as he stepped into the frail craft; then the man who had accompanied him took the tiller, the other man loosened the "painter" from the steps, and went to the oars. The doctor had been directed to seat himself half-way between the oarsman and the sailor at the helm.

Propelled by the vigorous strokes of the oarsman, the light craft shot out into the stream, and, when they left the pier behind, the gloom shut around them like a sable curtain.

The tide, at half-flood, set strongly up the river, so the oarsman was compelled to make allowance for this, instead of pulling straight for the vessel, the light of which acted as a guide for him.

At first the doctor had gazed curiously at the strange scene which the river presented at this hour of the night, but soon gloomy thoughts again began to take possession of him, and he allowed his head to sink upon his breast as he yielded to their influence.

This afforded the man behind him—the one who was at the tiller—the opportunity which he desired.

Diamond's back was toward him; the doctor faced the oarsman. In the bottom of the boat was a heavy blanket. The messenger, letting go of the tiller, took up the blanket carefully, unfolded it, and then, with a dextrous motion, cast it over the head of the unsuspecting doctor; the moment after he clasped his strong arms around Diamond's body, pinioning his hands to his side. The oarsman, too, dropping the sculls which were secured in the locks, sprung to the assistance of his companion.

Diamond was pretty powerful, as men go,

but, what could he do against two such assailants and taken as he was completely by surprise?

Bravely he struggled, but soon the ruffians overpowered him and bound him tightly, hand and foot, with the rope.

Then, placing him on the bottom of the boat, each man took an oar and they set to work to row in good earnest, changing however the direction of the boat entirely.

For about an hour Diamond, almost smothered by the blanket, had leisure to reflect upon the meaning of this strange assault.

It was not probable that his assailants were after plunder, for he carried nothing upon his person that would repay them for such trouble. What was the motive then?

Still onward went the boat, and still the busy thoughts chased each other through the brain of the captive man.

At length the grating of the boat's keel upon a shore changed the current of his thoughts.

He was lifted bodily from the bottom of the craft and carried along by the two men. The path was rough and uneven; he could detect this from their irregular motions, and then, when the way became smoother, from the sudden closeness and dampness of the air, the doctor guessed that he was in some subterranean passage. The air was as damp and dense as the reekings of a charnel-house.

At last his bearers stopped and laid him down at full length, and from the feel of the substance upon which he rested, he knew that it was earth.

"We are going to take off the blanket and release your hands so as to prepare you for what is to come," said one of the men, and by the voice Diamond recognized that it was the messenger who had pretended to be a sailor—the doctor was pretty certain now that it had been a pretense—who spoke.

The plot was plain to be seen; it was all a device to entrap him, but for what purpose? Ah, there was the mystery!

"Say," continued the speaker, "when we take the lashings off don't you go to cutting up ugly, for we are armed to the teeth and we shall not hesitate to use our weapons if you force us to do so."

By this time the blanket was removed and the doctor had a chance to look around him.

He was in a low passage which seemed like a tunnel, for there was earth below, above and on all sides. A lantern, which swung from a long spike, stuck in the wall, afforded light.

Two men were with him—he guessed they were the two who had been in the boat, but they had covered their faces with masks so that they could not be recognized; in truth, Diamond had taken so little notice of the face of the pretended sailor when he had had a chance to see it, that, when he thought over the matter he felt pretty certain he could not identify the man if he should happen to see him again.

One of the men commenced to undo the cord which bound his arms, while the other kept guard over him with a cocked revolver.

Of course, even when his arms were freed, any attempt to resist the will of his captors would be utter folly. His ankles were still tightly bound, sure precaution against an effective resistance.

The lashing which confined his arms being removed, the guard informed the doctor that he would be obliged to place a fastening upon his wrists, but then the rope around his ankles would be removed, so that he could walk.

"As you please," the doctor remarked, calmly, just as if all this outrageous proceeding was a mere commonplace matter.

The wrists were securely tied, then the rope around the ankles was removed and the ruffian assisted the doctor to rise.

Diamond had hardly any use of his limbs at first and it was as much as he could do to stand, for the cord had been wound very tightly around his ankles.

"Can you walk?" questioned the guard, when the prisoner finally stood alone.

"I think so," and to try, he took a few steps forward.

"Oh, you're all right now. Go ahead," the other said to his comrade. "Give the signal-knock that a captive waits."

CHAPTER III.

THE WHITE BAND.

THIS was more and more mysterious; and with keen attention Diamond looked upon the movements of the ruffians.

One of them approached the wall and with the metal-mounted butt of his revolver struck on it; the clang of a distant bell answered, and suddenly a cavity appeared in what was apparently solid earth. There was no sound as if a door had opened, but the wall, as it were, melted away. In truth it looked like magic.

Beyond the opening a long, narrow, dark passage appeared.

"Follow him and I will bring up the rear," said the ruffian, who all along had acted as spokesman.

Into the passageway went ruffian No. 1; after him the doctor; then No. 2.

The moment they were fairly within the pas-

sageway the opening suddenly closed again, and Egyptian darkness prevailed.

"March right on and when I tell you, stop," the ruffian ordered.

Impelled by curiosity the doctor counted the steps.

The way seemed long enough, and yet Diamond had only measured twenty steps when the harsh voice of the leader called out for him to halt.

"Now, count twenty-five," continued the man, "then walk ten steps forward and stop. Count out loud, so that I kin hear you."

All this seemed like child's play, but Diamond did as he was told—he counted twenty-five, then stepped forward ten paces and halted.

The darkness was intense—so dense it reminded one of the old saying that it could be cut with a knife.

But hardly had the doctor finished the performance of the task which had been set for him, than it seemed as if it was growing lighter. At first he thought it only appeared so because his eyes were getting used to the darkness, but soon he became convinced that the darkness really was vanishing, and with considerable curiosity he watched this new development of the strange affair.

Less and less dense grew the darkness, and the gloom was melting away so slowly that the change was almost imperceptible; it was like the breaking of the dawn.

Gradually the gloom became so transparent that the doctor was able to distinguish the surrounding objects; and as near as he could make out he was standing in the middle of an immense burial vault; in the walls were niches where rotting coffins lay, and the peculiar smell which had so forcibly struck him upon his first entry into this mysterious place was now explained; it was reeking with the foul gases which arise from the mortal remains of the once quick and living, slowly returning to the dust from whence man comes.

The place reminded the doctor, who was a great student, of the vast vaults such as are usually found under the great European churches, and the dim, uncertain light was such as would come from a half-score of flickering tapers, for it wavered and danced, as if, like an artful girl, it was coquetting with the dark shadows which lurked in the corners of this gloomy receptacle of the dead.

The doctor had just about mastered this knowledge when a voice broke the solemn silence which reigned therein:

"Prisoner, turn and look upon your judges."

The voice was singularly flexible and pleasant, although the command was sternly delivered.

The doctor wheeled around, impatient for a solution of the mystery, and a strange sight indeed met his eyes.

In the center of the vault were grouped three figures, all robed in white shrouds, but the shrouds were so arranged that they covered the head as well as the body, but the part that went over the faces was in some peculiar way so arranged that it was partly transparent, and the contour of the faces beneath could plainly be discerned, and the faces were white and ghastly like the features of the dead.

The center figure was seated upon a long object covered with a black cloth, which from its shape was evidently a coffin; the other two were standing leaning upon great naked cross-hilted swords, such as were used by the head-men in the old feudal days. On each side of the two, leaning upon the swords, stood a grisly skeleton, one bony hand uplifted and bearing in its stony clutch a taper of black wax which burned with a quivering, uncertain light.

It was a scene calculated to try the nerves of the strongest man, and yet in the face of two doctor neither curiosity nor fear was perceptible; it was as if he wore a fleshy mask.

"Doctor Diamond, you are very near to death," said the center figure.

"May I be allowed to ask what crime I have committed?" the doctor replied.

"You know before whom you stand?"

"Indeed I do not."

"Does not your own knowledge tell you that?"

"It does not."

"Nor the crime that you have committed?"

"I do not."

"Whether you live or die depends upon yourself alone. You stand before the Council of Three, the Head-centers of the White Band; now you know who we are, and you know, too, why you have been brought here."

"No, sir, you are wrong; I do not know—I am utterly and entirely in the dark."

"This pretended ignorance will not avail you!" the man in the shroud exclaimed, impatiently. "We know that you are possessed of our secret, and we must be satisfied in regard to the use that you intend to make of that knowledge."

"I assure you, sir, you are laboring under a great mistake. I know absolutely nothing whatever about you, or your organization, more than I have learned this night," Diamond answered, earnestly, although he had an idea that the assertion would not be believed.

"We know better!" exclaimed the chief, sternly. "You attended the death-bed of a member of our band lately, and he, poor, craven wretch, horrified at the near approach of death, and terrified at the prospects of the Hereafter which he was so near, thought to make his peace with Heaven by betraying the secrets of his associates. He selected you as the medium to communicate the facts to the authorities, but we are better served than is the superintendent of the police of New York. We knew that we had been betrayed in twenty minutes after the tale was told to you. At six to-night the secret was confided to your care, at seven the traitor breathed his last, and by that time we were fully prepared to meet the consequences of his treachery. A watch was placed upon you, and if you had attempted to go directly to head-quarters to lay your information before the police authorities—as no doubt the traitor counseled you to do, for he as well as any man living knew how far-reaching are our arms and how extended our information—you would never have been allowed to reach Mulberry street alive. A desperate hand had been selected. You would have been stricken dead in the street with one well-directed blow, and the newspapers would have had another mysterious murder to chronicle. But you doubtless thought that the morning would do as well as the night, and that to-morrow you would make the revelation which would destroy the White Band, root and branch. You did not act promptly, but we did, and the result is that we hold you a prisoner, and with death so near, that if you do not feel the cold breath of the King of Terrors it is a wonder."

"Will you permit me a few words of explanation?" the doctor asked, slowly.

"Go on; when a man has so little time to talk in this world, as you have, it would be a shame to deny him speech."

"Your information is not correct; I know absolutely nothing in regard to your band. I did attend a dying man this afternoon and remained with him until death placed a seal upon his lips, and just before he died, he did confide a secret to me, but he never mentioned a single word in regard to any secret organization. The communication was made in a whisper, for he had not strength to speak aloud; no ear but mine could possibly have heard the words. Your spy was deceived; he imagined that the dying man was confiding your secrets to me, but it was not so. I swear to you that it is the truth upon my honor as a man."

"A very reasonable explanation," observed the shrouded chief with a nod; "you will excuse me, though, if I ask for proof that this story is true?"

"What proof can I give you?"

"Repeat what the dying man *did* say."

The doctor hesitated for a few moments.

"I cannot," he said, at last, slowly but firmly. "It is a secret, and I am bound by oath not to disclose it."

A mocking, jeering laugh came from the lips of the chief of the band.

"Oh, what a set of idiots you must take us for!" he exclaimed. "Do you think that for a single instant we will believe this tale? Why, man, it is your life that is at stake!"

"And on the other hand my honor also."

"Bah! lost honor can be regained, but a life, never!"

"A man without honor might as well be without life."

All three of the disguised men shook their heads in evident disapproval of this sentiment; they did not agree with it at all.

"You are either a very remarkable man or else you are trying to play a huge game of bluff upon us," the chief observed. "But I tell you what it is, Doctor Diamond, take us how you will, at any game, or in any way, and you will find that we are a terrible hard gang to beat. We are not satisfied with your explanation, and do not believe that it is the truth. It is a clever dodge on your part, and the only thing that you can do to convince us to the contrary is to reveal to us this important secret which the dying man confided to you. Remember! it is a question of life and death!"

"I am bound by oath, and that oath I will not break even to save my life!" answered Diamond, firmly.

This heroic resolve did not impress the three very much, for they thought it was only a clever ruse on the part of the captive to escape.

The man on the right hand of the seated chief now spoke.

"Most worshipful Lord of the Light," he said, with a low obeisance to the man in the center, "might not the prisoner avail himself of the article in our charter which permits a stranger under certain conditions to save himself from any penalty that he may have incurred, either knowingly or unknowingly?"

"Well thought, Sword of Vengeance," said the chief, approvingly; "you will be his sponsor?"

"I will."

"He needs a second one; what say you, Sword of Justice, will you join your brother in this act?"

"I will," responded the shrouded figure on

the left hand, with a most unmistakably Jewish accent, and as the doctor heard the voice he compressed his lips to avoid betraying himself, for he was sure that he recognized the speaker.

The chief then again addressed the prisoner:

"As you have doubtless surmised, if you do not know our secret as you assert, and as you surely are aware if you are in possession of it, our society, which is known as the White Band because, when we meet in council, we resemble

"A band of spirits bright, all robed in spotless white,

And conquering palms we bear,"

is essentially a benevolent organization, and formed, primarily, to right the wrongs under which the world at large really suffers. As you are probably aware, being a student, the state of things at present is radically wrong. One man has an income of a thousand dollars a day, and another man has absolutely nothing. Now, as far as the members of our society are concerned, we intend to right this really gigantic wrong. Our process is an extremely simple one. We find out some man who has a great deal more money than he is entitled to and we relieve him of some of his surplus funds, distributing the money among our brotherhood. You will perceive that we strike at the very root of the evil, without any foolish flummery; no noise—no publicity."

"But some trouble, sometimes," observed the doctor, very dryly.

"Oh yes; that is the history of all attempts to radically change the course of existing affairs; individuals must suffer, so that the public at large may be benefited. And now that you know about our organization, you will be prepared to decide in regard to this matter suggested by my esteemed friends here. They think that a man like yourself would be a desirable addition to our ranks, and that is my opinion, too, for in your capacity as a medical man you will be able to obtain information which will be of great value to us. Not as you are situated at present, though; you must come out of your obscure quarters and take a residence up-town where you can obtain patients worth having. It will require money, of course, to set you up in the proper style, but we will attend to that. How does the idea strike you?"

"In plain words you wish me to join your band, which, I take it, is an organization of robbers, felons and possibly murderers."

"We never use violence if we can help it, but if we happen to be so unfortunate as to be cornered, why then, of course, self-preservation is the first law of nature," the chief replied, coolly.

"I am afraid I shall have to decline. I am not of a covetous nature; I am content with my present position and the income which it produces, and I do not care to become connected with your scheme, which, to my mind, offers more chances for the State Prison and the halter than anything else."

"Do not decide rashly," cautioned the other; "it is life that you are refusing."

"I am a fatalist," the doctor replied, with cold disdain. "What is to be will be. If I am fated to die by your hands, why, it is my destiny and I cannot avoid it."

"Two chances for life you have; make us certain that you do not know our secret, by revealing the one which you say was intrusted to you, or join our band."

"Neither the one nor the other."

"Then death waits for you—a horrid, lingering death, ten times worse than the rope of the hangman can give."

The chief arose from his seat and plucked off the black cloth which covered the object upon which he had sat, and, as the doctor had suspected, it was a coffin—such a coffin, it was safe to say, as the eye of man had never looked upon before. It was no common stuff, no rose-wood casket, but made of solid gold, and richly ornamented with precious stones. In itself it represented a fortune, and even the calm and immobile doctor stared at the cloth was pulled aside and the wonderful thing revealed in all its richness.

"Well, how does this strike you?" questioned the shrouded chief. "You see in one respect we intend to usher you into the other world in a first-class manner. Your funeral won't amount to much, but when it comes to the coffin, we challenge the world to produce its equal: no Egyptian king, no monarch of golden-bearing Africa, or jewel-laden Asia ever had its like, even counting back to the days of Prester John with all its fabulous wealth. And your tomb, too, will be on the same magnificent scale. Oh, we are going to 'plant' you splendidly. Behold!"

The speaker stamped his foot and, right in front of the spot where the coffin stood, in the dark, damp ground, a circular cavity, about ten feet in diameter, appeared. It seemed like a gigantic well-hole.

"In the golden coffin you will be buried alive, there!" exclaimed the master-spirit of this secret band, pointing with outstretched finger into the horrible void that seemed like the entrance to the lower world where Satan reigns supreme.

"And you will doom me, a stranger to you, a man who never harmed you in the least, to this awful death?" the doctor asked, signs of strong emotion appearing on his countenance.

"Yes, and our vengeance will pursue you beyond the grave, for, after you are dead, we will sell your body to the surgeons to be hacked with sharp knives, as you doubtless have hacked others' bodies many a time."

"Will you grant me one last request?"

"Yes, so long as you do not ask for life, or for us not to sell your body after the life is out of it."

CHAPTER IV.

THE REQUEST.

OH, have no fear on that score. I am not likely to waste words in asking for that which I am sure you will not grant, and as for this poor mortal shell what care I what becomes of it after the life is gone? As well may it be used to enlighten my fellow-men as to rest in the earth, food for worms.

The chief of the mysterious White Band was about as cool a hand as could readily be found, but now, for the first time in his life—and that life embraced a career which the pen of fiction could not hope to rival in wild adventure—he was forced to admit that, in the doctor he had met a man who was more than his equal in nerve. If he had been placed in the captive's position, he knew that he would not have faced death so coolly, for life was very sweet indeed to him, and he would have struggled desperately to have preserved it.

And yet, great as was the doctor's courage, it did not inspire any sentiment of pity in the breast of the masked man. On the contrary, he felt a powerful desire to put the other out of the way; some subtle instinct seemed to warn the chief of the league that the helpless captive in the future might do him much harm if he was permitted to live.

The feeling was only a sort of vague presentiment, but the man was a firm believer in that sort of thing, and would not go contrary to these mysterious warnings.

"Well, what is your request?"

"You desire my death?"

"You must die for our safety."

"Be that as it may, the statement is correct?"

"It is."

"And so long as I am placed in the golden coffin and lowered into this well-hole, which I presume it is, you do not care how I come to my death, whether suddenly or in long and lingering suffering?"

"No, I do not see as it does make much of any difference; I suppose you want us to kill you outright?"

"No, but I desire a less painful death than the one which you propose to give me. I have in my medicine-case a small vial of an almost unknown poison. It is from India, and is only known to the natives of that land. Its action is speedy and the sensation not unpleasant, so it is said. It produces sleep, and from the sleep the partaker wakes in death. It was given me by an old sea-captain whose life I was fortunate enough to save in a severe attack of yellow fever. He had come straight from India, and a native doctor, whom he had befriended, gave him this potent stuff, saying that if he ever had an enemy whom he desired to kill without detection, the contents of the vial would enable him to accomplish it, and that, how the deed was committed would never be discovered by any Christian doctor; and that when the potion was once administered there was absolutely no cure, and that death must ensue. The captain took it to please the man, and got rid of it at the first opportunity, for he had no use for such dangerous stuff. He gave it to me to experiment upon."

"And now you propose to try it upon yourself?"

"Yes, with your permission."

A sudden suspicion flashed into the brain of the arch-plotter. The coolness of the captive seemed unnatural; was this poison business a device to escape death? It might be a simple, powerful narcotic which would throw him into a stupor so closely resembling death that it would pass for death itself, and then when he came into the hands of the medical men the cheat would be detected, restoratives applied and their vengeance frustrated. If this was so it would explain the coolness of the prisoner, but at the same time it showed that he had wonderful nerve.

"Where is this vial?"

"In my medicine-case, in the breast-pocket of my coat."

The chief at once possessed himself of the case. In order to do this, of course he had to come quite close to the captive. The doctor then detected a very sweet, but peculiar perfume which seemed to come from the other. Immediately the idea presented itself that, if by any lucky accident he should manage to escape from his present peril, and should take it into his head to hunt down the men who composed the secret band, this peculiar perfume would be a very good clew by which to identify this man, who, it was clear, was no common ruffian.

The leather medicine-case contained a quantity of little vials, more or less filled with medicine.

"Which one of these is it?"

"The square one."

The masked man had selected this as containing the drug, because it was such a strange, odd-shaped bottle, and so entirely different from all the others in the case.

"This is the one!" and he held it up.

"It is."

The chief then examined the contents of the bottle with a great deal of curiosity, as did also the other two.

Apparently it only contained a small quantity of salt, about as much as would lie on the small blade of a common pen-knife.

The chief uncorked the bottle and smelt of it, but there was absolutely no scent to it.

"This is a humbug—nothing but salt."

"It is to be dissolved in water and then drank."

"All of it dissolved?"

"I cannot tell that, although the captain told me that the native who gave it to him said there was enough poison in the vial to kill a dozen men."

"I doubt it!" exclaimed the chief. "It is a humbug!" Then he poured a little of the stuff out in his hand and applied his tongue to it, much to the wonder of his associates, who would not have risked the test for a good sum of money.

"It is not salt," he said, taking great care to spit out the stuff after tasting it; "it has an acrid, bitter taste, but I doubt very much if there is any virtue in it. I have heard these tales of the India poisons before, but I never met anybody who really knew anything about them. But, if you want to experiment on yourself, I don't see any objection, do you, gentlemen?" and he appealed to the two other shrouded men.

They shook their heads in the negative.

"A glass of water for our esteemed friend, then."

The water was brought.

"Shall I pour the whole of this precious mixture into the glass?"

"If you will be so kind." The prisoner could not be more polite if the masked man had been his bosom friend instead of his executioner.

The salt-like substance dissolved almost instantly and left no trace whatever of its being; the water was as pure as though it had not been tampered with.

"By Jove!" the white chief muttered, "if this stuff is good for anything what a terrible weapon it would be; but I do not credit it. If there was anything in it, the Europeans would have wrung the secret from the natives long ago. Well, are you ready?" he asked, turning to the captive.

"Quite ready."

The chief held the glass to the lips of the prisoner and he drained it dry.

"Any taste?" curiously queried the mask.

"None in the least."

"And the effect?"

"I do not feel any."

"Bah! I knew that it was a humbug!" but for all the repeated declaration the disguised man looked at the captive in a way which seemed to imply that he was not so certain of this point as he pretended to be.

"I begin to feel a slight sensation of drowsiness now," the prisoner remarked.

"If it is like other poisons, and there was enough in the vial to kill a dozen men, you have an over-dose and it may not produce the desired effect," the chief suggested.

"That holds good with certain drugs only; with others the greater the quantity taken the quicker and more certain the death."

"Well, this is certainly not a very quick one."

"No, so it is said, and therefore is it so dangerous—so desirable a weapon in the hands of one who desires to strike down a foe and yet does not wish to have his agency in the matter suspected. It produces sleep, temporary insensibility, followed by total, and it leaves absolutely no trace behind by the aid of which science can detect the cause of death."

"How you will bother the medical men, then, when they commence to operate on you!" the chief observed, with a chuckle. "They will slice you open, examine your interior and then throw up their hands with wonder. 'Of what disease did this man die?' they will cry. 'He is in perfect health; no signs of violence, and ought, in the course of Nature, to have lived thirty or forty years more.' Why, it will be a ten days' wonder!"

The captive surveyed the speaker with calm attention as he uttered this brutal speech; was this man a demon thus to gloat over his victim? and then, in the heart of the doctor swelled a wild desire; he prayed that the hand of Providence might interpose and in some miraculous way aid him to escape from the seemingly certain death that threatened, so that he might take upon himself the rôle of an avenger. He vowed that, if Heaven answered the prayer, he would devote all the rest of his life to hunting down and exterminating every member of this

mysterious White Band from the potent, powerful chief down to the humblest follower.

"We must put you in your little bed," the shrouded man continued. "We can't wait here all night for the drug to operate, but down in the pit you will be all quiet and snug; no one will disturb you and you will be able to watch the workings of this mysterious stuff from 'farther land' with care and attention—that is, if it does work, which I doubt. You are going down some distance. This hole was dug for a well but after going down fifty feet without striking water the parties got sick of their work and gave it up, so you see you will have a tomb which cannot find its fellow. To work, gentlemen."

Unresistingly the doctor suffered himself to be placed in the golden coffin, the lid, which was so heavy that it took the combined strength of the three men to lift it, was put in its place. No need to fasten it down, for no person confined within the narrow limits could have budged.

Then by means of a skillful arrangement of pulleys and ropes, the massive weight was lowered into the deep well-hole. Down—down it went into the region of eternal night.

The man was buried alive, and the task was as completely performed as though so many feet of solid earth, instead of air, rested upon the golden coffin.

CHAPTER V.

HOPPERGRASS IS PUZZLED.

AFTER parting with the doctor the boy had meditated for a few minutes over the situation.

"Spect I better go to roost," he said, after thinking about the matter. "I can't do the gal any good by loafin' around the entry all night, and if she should happen to want me she knows where to find me. But where in thunder did she raise all that money? Why, she had a hunk of bills as big as my fist—must have been most a hundred dollars there, and I know that she give me the last ten cents that she had for medicine jest afore I went after the Doc. Well, it jest beats me, that's what it does."

The boy shook his head in a solemn manner as he marched off to his "roost."

In the great city are many strange habitations—many odd sleeping-places, but is it safe to assert that, search the metropolis over, from the Battery to Harlem river, a more singular bedchamber than that occupied by the boy could not have been found.

The old rookery in which the mother and daughter resided was no modern-built tenement-house; on the contrary it was a dilapidated old wooden building, two story and an attic high, which, in all probability, was a hundred years old; at any rate, so old that no one in the neighborhood could tell when it had been erected.

Under the house was a cavity, about six feet deep, which had once been a cellar, but that was long ago. The stairs leading down into it had been appropriated by poverty-stricken tenants for firewood, and the agent then had the cellar entrance boarded up, and so the cellar, like the history of the house, vanished into the darkness of obscurity.

But the street rat, resembling his prototype of the sewer, was keen on the scent, and in some mysterious way he got an idea that there was a sort of cellar under the building, and when winter came on and the nights became too cold to allow him to sleep with comfort in his usual resorts, the old wagons standing in the streets—the empty coal box of the Dutch groceryman at the corner—the rear entryway of some tenement-house, where he was not likely to be disturbed by inquisitive and meddling "cops," the young gamin set out to find some more comfortable "bunking" place.

True, there was the five-cent lodging-house down-town expressly for the accommodation of all such homeless lads, but five cents to Hoppergrass was quite a large sum of money, multiplied by seven it made thirty-five, and thirty-five multiplied by fifty-two was eighteen dollars and twenty cents; and so, in one year's time, by saving the price of a lodging, and putting the money in the bank, he would have enough to buy a stationary news-stand, one of those crosses between a small house and a big box, which, by the kindness of a storekeeper, is permitted to occupy an eligible position on the sidewalk. In such a shanty there could be a small stove, a bunk under the counter, and thus real, solid comfort could be enjoyed. To be the sole proprietor of such an elaborate establishment was the great desire of the boy's heart, and, young as he was, he had already learned the truth, which the majority of mankind live and die without knowing—that it is not what you get, but the sum you save, that makes wealth in this world.

The idea of the "dog-house," as the boy commonly termed the newspaper shanty aforesaid, realized, a newspaper route and an assortment of candies for the young patrons, and tobacco and cigars for the older ones, could easily be added, and then the high road to fortune would be reached.

Smile not, reader, at the day-dream of the lad, nor look upon it as an idle dream, for many

a man who now counts his gains by thousands commenced in just such a small way.

So, to gain his object the boy knew of but one course to follow, and that was to save every cent he possibly could until he had enough capital to purchase the dog-house.

He must have some comfortable place to sleep in the winter time. In the summer he could get along anywhere; but to expose himself to the likelihood of freezing to death would upset his golden dream altogether.

In the rear of the old building was a diminutive yard, a small window there, low down in the side of the house, had once admitted light to the cellar, but the glass had vanished long ago, and a board had been roughly nailed up to close the hole; as the cellar was not used, light was not wanted.

Hoppergrass had forced the board away and had explored the cellar. As it had happened the shed which had been built for the inmates of the house to store their wood and coal in, was placed almost directly in front of this old window, and there was a narrow way, left by the carelessness of the carpenters who constructed the shed, between it and the fence which separated this yard from the next one and this passage, which led directly to the window.

After making the discovery that there was a cellar under the house, and that it would answer for a lodging-place, the boy replaced the board carefully and was very particular never to go near the spot in the daytime. The secret was too valuable to share it with any one. There were always plenty of "bummers" hanging around the court—worthless, drunken, homeless wretches who would have been only too glad to get into such a capital sleeping-place, and the boy well knew that, if the existence of the place was discovered some one of these drunken ruffians would be sure to dispossess him.

The secret, though, was not betrayed, for no one was likely to squeeze between the shed and the fence to examine the side of the house unless he, Hoppergrass, was noticed taking that road; hence the boy was very careful on this score.

In the cellar he had arranged a most excellent "roosting-place." There was a break in the tone foundation in the rear of the cellar, evidently left at the time when the house was built for the purpose of affording a rear passage, but the design had never been carried out. Into the solid wall of dirt that filled up the opening the boy had tunneled, working at night by candle-light, and taking particular care to be as quiet as a mouse in the operation. He dug out a little sort of cave, the bottom of which was about a yard higher than the level of the cellar, which in the time of heavy rains might become wet, and therefore very unpleasant for him once in awhile.

The passage, which was about a yard high and wide by two yards long, he filled completely with straw, carrying it in by night in small quantities, and when the winter blasts blew keen the boy would crawl into his snug hole, curl himself up in his straw and sleep as warm as toast.

The idea was a great success, and the lad envied no one on earth when it came to sleeping accommodations; as a general rule, ten minutes after he was in his cubby-hole, he was in the arms of Morpheus, but on this night he did not fall asleep as usual. The—to him—enormous roll of bills which the girl took from her bosom astonished him, and he could not understand in the least where she could have obtained the money, knowing as he did that, since her mother's illness, and her inability to do much work on account of attending to her mother, she had pawned everything she had upon which the pawnbroker would advance any money in order to procure food and medicine.

"A hundred dollars," he muttered, dreamily, as he closed his eyes at last; "mebbe more'n a hundred, mebbe a thousand. Gosh! what a hunk!"

At last sleep came, and in his sleep he dreamed of the wealth which the girl had so unexpectedly displayed.

He was up bright and early in the morning, for in the newspaper line, more than any other perhaps, the truth of the saying that the early bird catches the worm is realized.

He had made up his mind that it was too early for him to call upon Miss Eldon, as she would not probably like to be disturbed after the grief and toil which she had lately encountered, but, as he passed through the entryway of the house he was surprised to see the door of the apartment, which the girl and her mother occupied, wide open, and Mrs. Mulcarthy, the Celtic lady who lived opposite, standing in the center of the room, looking around her with a great deal of satisfaction, but the living girl and the dead mother were gone!

"Hello, where's the gal and the woman?" the boy exclaimed, in astonishment.

"They're gone."

"Gone where?"

"How should I know? Do ye think that the likes of me would be after inquiring into the private business of me neighbors? I'm a lady, I'll have ye to know, an' I allers demane meself

as sich, an' axes no impetent questions, do ye mind?"

"But the old woman was dead—she died last night!"

"Is it possible? Well, now, ye r'ally astonish me; but, now that I put me mind to it, I remember that I didn't see her this morning. It was about ten minutes ago that the young lady came and knocked at me dure. 'The top of the morning to ye,' she sed, whin I answered the knock; 'I do be afther goin' away an' I'm not coming back ag'in, an' as ye have been very kind to me mother an' meself would ye be after not feeling offended if I made ye a present of the few things in the rooms?' 'God knows I wouldn't,' sed I, glad enough to get the laste taste of anything these hard times, 'but I'll take them an' thank ye kindly, too.' 'Ye'r quite welkim,' she sed, 'an' I wish that they was more for yees.' 'Don't say a word,' sed I, 'the smallest favors thankfully received.' 'Good-by,' sed she. 'Good-by,' sed I, an' away she went."

"Crackey! I wish that I had a-seen her!" the boy exclaimed, evidently disappointed.

"Oh, musba!" cried the woman, suddenly. "Shure me head is upside down an' I've lost me mimory intirely! Here's a letter that she was afther l'aving for yees, Master Hoppergrass," and with a great deal of dignity she produced the letter from the pocket of her gown.

The boy opened it eagerly, and a ten-dollar bill dropped out and fluttered to the floor.

"Oh, tare an' 'ounds! will ye look at that?" Mrs. Mulcarthy cried.

The boy picked up the money and then read the brief note that accompanied it:

"Pay the doctor and keep the change for yourself as a slight reward for your many acts of kindness. Your friend, DURA ELDON."

He read it aloud, and great was Mrs. Mulcarthy's astonishment.

"Tin dollars to yees an' the things to me! Has she come inter a fortune, do ye think?"

"Gosh! if I ain't a-going to find her!" and the boy raced madly out into the court.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DELIVERY.

FOR five days the golden coffin, like the famous one of Mahomet, renowned in story, hung between heaven and earth.

Five days of lingering torture, if the suspicion that the disguised chief of the league entertained was true, that is, that the drug was worthless. And, oh, what pen could depict the agony that a helpless human being would suffer, shut up in such a cage? What mattered it that it was made of gold? Lead or iron would not have been worse.

During the five days, at frequent intervals, the members of the White Band had stolen into the damp vault and had peered curiously down into the well-hole. They had an idea that they might hear shrieks, prayers and curses rising from the depths of the gloomy abyss, so that a stranger, not knowing the source of the noise, would be apt to imagine that the pit led straight to the infernal regions and that the despairing cries came from the unhappy souls condemned to everlasting torments.

But not a sound rose from the hole during the whole of the five days—that is, as far as any member of the band knew, and they kept pretty careful watch, too; not even a groan of anguish, or the final cry as the body parted with its soul came to their hearing.

The chief, however, explained the matter reasonably enough. Be it noted that one and all of the band scouted the idea of the poison; the tale was altogether too tough for their belief. He reasoned that the weight of the coffin-lid, resting square and true upon the box beneath, had almost entirely cut off the supply of air, and then what air did reach the imprisoned man must be full of the foul vapors that were in the depths of the pit, and whose existence could be distinctly discerned by any one who took the trouble to lean over the gulf and sniff at the air which rose from it. If the prisoner had had free access to the air—all that he could breathe—in a very short time, indeed, the mephitic vapors must have exerted their unwholesome influence upon him. So the leader of the White Band explained to his followers that it was not strange no sound ascended from the hole, inasmuch as the man had, in all probability, been suffocated in a very short time after being lowered into the gloomy depths.

At the end of five days the chief, satisfied that the spy, who had by accident learned the terrible secret which had brought him into the clutches of the masked men, was powerless now for either good or evil, gave orders to have the coffin hoisted up again.

Once more the golden casket rose to earth and was deposited in its former position.

With eager hands the members of the band hastened to remove the lid, anxious to look upon their victim.

But when they came to do this work they made a discovery that greatly alarmed them at first. The prisoner, whether by accident or design (of course no one could say with any degree of certainty which it was), had contrived

when the lid was lowered upon the coffin to thrust the ends of the rope with which his wrists were tied in between the cover and the box so that the lid could not come down square and tight. By this maneuver a fair supply of air was assured.

The chief, ever suspicious, was alarmed when he discovered this, which he did before the lid was removed, but when, with great exertions, the heavy weight was lifted off, there, in the golden coffin, lay the victim safe enough; cold and still, and yet his death had not, apparently, been a painful one, for his face was not in the least distorted, as it surely would have been if he had died in dreadful agony. Indeed, as he lay in the coffin he did not look like one cold in the embrace of death, but rather like a man enjoying a pleasant sleep whom a touch would waken in an instant.

So perfect was the illusion that the chief reached out his hand and touched his cheek, but no warm flush of life did he feel; only the cold clamminess that told of death.

Iron-nerved as he was, the touch made him shudder, for the sensation he experienced was entirely unexpected; the body was as cold as though it had been kept upon ice.

"He's dead, sure enough, eh, captain?" quoth one of the band.

"Oh, yes; there isn't much doubt about it, although he may be in a trance," and the speaker looked at the coffin and its contents very suspiciously.

For reasons which he could not explain the man had taken a great dislike to the stranger whom he had made his victim. Dislike was hardly the word for it, either, for he not only experienced aversion but fear; some instinct seemed to warn him that the doctor's star was destined to exert an evil influence over his own, and even now that the man lay before him, motionless in death's clutches, powerless for either good or evil, still the sentiment of fear lingered in the mind of the executioner. The lifelike appearance of the victim puzzled him, and he knew not how to account for it. He had seen a great many dead men in his time, but never one that looked like this.

Then to his mind came the memory of the drug which he had permitted the man to take, and he was half-inclined to curse his folly at yielding to the request. Instead of a poison it might be that it was a powerful narcotic which would produce a death-like sleep, and from which, after a lapse of time, the partaker would wake to life again, unharmed.

"I have read of such a thing a hundred times," he muttered to himself, as he gazed with doubtful eyes upon the strongly-marked and resolute-looking face of Diamond. "But it is not possible! I have asked medical men and they all say that no such drug exists, but it may, though, for all that, for these far eastern climes, with all their apparent barbarism, possess some secrets that we, with our boasted knowledge have never succeeded in penetrating. Shall I take my knife and with one vigorous blow make sure that he will never waken to life again?"

For quite a while he pondered over the question. To use the knife would be to make sure of the victim, but then he would lose the sum which he was to receive for the body, and it was a pretty large one, too, for he had secured a first-class customer—an odd, eccentric old physician, who, for such a "subject" as this one, had agreed to pay a really extraordinary price. No respectable physician would accept the body of a murdered man.

But, while he was debating this weighty subject in his mind, a sudden idea came to him. Even if the man was in a trance, it was so much like death that the doctor would be pretty certain, in his eagerness to examine the case, to use his knife, and so death would come, anyway.

This thought decided the chief at once. Two hundred dollars was the sum which had been agreed upon, and that, even to the powerful leader of the White Band, was an acceptable sum.

"Get the bag ready and dump him in," he commanded. "We will get our ducats for this one, although we did miss it on the old 'stiff' that we went to so much trouble about."

"Yes, curse the luck!" growled one of the gang, a big, burly fellow, who was playing a most prominent part in the operation of stowing the body away in the bag which had been brought. "Who would have thought that rich coves like them, with all their millions, would squeal at forking over a hundred thousand or so for the 'stiff' of the old man, and then they could have stuck it in the gay old tomb that they fixed for him down in the country."

"Yes, it seemed a sure thing. If I hadn't thought so, I wouldn't have run the risk and gone to the trouble we did. But, these rich duffers are a set of hogs; all they care for is their money-bags," the chief remarked, sourly.

"If you have noticed, boys, all these big schemes of ours have turned out badly. There was the boy business that we calculated would pan out ten to twenty thousand dollars, and nary a dime did we ever get out of it. The youngster died

on our hands, and the police hounded the men who did the job so that they couldn't pick up a decent living—drove them off to the country, and in 'cracking' that house down on the shore they got a bellyful of shot instead of plunder, and so we lost the best two men in our band. Then there was the scheme to flood Europe with forged notes; the whole thing goes right to smash at the very beginning, before our agents could get a chance to do a stroke of work, and the result will be that instead of pulling in a bushel of money our men will be nabbed, and we shall be obliged to raise five or ten thousand dollars for their trial, and to get them out of jail afterward, for they are certain to be convicted."

A general chorus of exclamations of regret came from the members of the band at this announcement, for all understood that this meant short commons for them for some time, unless they happened to strike in on some rich lead, which did not seem to be very probable just at present.

From the foregoing remarks the reader will understand that the White Band was about as powerful an association of ruffians as had ever been banded together. Headed by a man who really had a wonderful genius for organizing and directing such a league, and comprising about all the rascals of note in the country, most of the great crimes of the past few years could be traced directly to them.

Body-snatching for a ransom; kidnapping children and beautiful girls for the same object; threatening the latter with a fate worse than death if their friends did not come down with the money demanded as the price of their release. Hence it can be understood why such men, with so many crimes upon their heads, should be so eager to take vengeance upon the man whom they believed to be in possession of the secret of their league, why they should be determined at any cost to stop his mouth so that he should not reveal the knowledge which he had gained to the world. They believed that their lives depended upon their speedy and decisive action.

About ten o'clock that night an express wagon drove up to the door of a pretty little cottage situated close to the banks of the Harlem river in one of the upper wards of the metropolis.

The plate attached to the door of the house bore the name of Daniel Doramus.

The driver of the wagon and his two companions jumped out and dragged a long box from the wagon, then rung the bell.

The owner appeared.

"C. O. D. two hundred dollars," said the driver.

"All right; carry the box up-stairs so I can see the contents," replied the owner of the cottage.

And so the body was delivered.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SAVANTS.

DOCTOR DANIEL DORAMUS was about as well-known as any man in New York. In his day he had had one of the best practices in the city, had amassed a large fortune, then had retired from active business to enjoy himself in his favorite pursuits.

The doctor was a remarkable-looking man, being fully six feet high, gaunt in figure, more bones than flesh, angular in aspect, and having prominent features, large nose, high cheekbones, but small gray eyes, hid underneath enormously protruding eyebrows, and the face being fringed with an independent pair of iron-gray whiskers, each particular hair of which seemed to assert its individuality above the others by detaching itself from its fellows and sticking straight out, it gave him a close resemblance indeed to an enormous gray monkey.

For some five years—in fact ever since his retirement, Mr. Doramus had devoted himself to a number of experiments, for he could not content himself with a life of idleness; finally he had concentrated all his efforts upon one particular object. Day and night he had studied and toiled, and now, at last, he fancied that he was on the eve of success. All he lacked was a "subject" to experiment upon. Now, to a medical man who knew the "ropes" as well as the old doctor, to procure a "subject" was not a difficult matter, for medical colleges must be supplied and, although the law is supposed to be strict upon this matter, yet it is a well-known fact that students of the "saw-bone trade" do not suffer for want of opportunities to experiment "on the human form divine."

The doctor knew exactly where to go, but to procure the article he wanted was difficult, for no common subject, such as usually gave satisfaction to the "trade," would do for him; he wanted an A No. 1 article, and to procure such he was obliged to pay the rather stiff figure which the "ghouls" demanded.

The prize was his at last, though; it was safely deposited on the marble table in his study stretched out on its back, ready for the experiment.

The old gentleman had cast only a casual glance at the body—just enough to assure himself that the “goods” were up to the mark, and exactly as had been represented, before he paid over the money to the “expressman,” and now, after the men had departed, he hurried upstairs, eager to take a good look at his cadaver.

Everything was in readiness; the glittering knives, upon which the bright beams of the gas-light danced, were upon the marble-topped table by the side of the body, flanked on each side by large and curiously-shaped bottles filled with colored liquids.

The body was covered by a dark cloth; all that could be distinguished of it was the outlines of the mortal remains that reposed beneath.

In a great hurry the old gentleman stripped off his coat and rolled his shirt sleeves up to the elbow, baring both arms.

Then, with really feverish impatience, he stripped the cloth from the body and proceeded to examine his prize with critical eyes.

“Splendid!” he exclaimed, with true professional ardor. “Magnificent! The fellows did not lie, after all! It is well worth the money. It is really a shame, though, that I am to have all this to myself. By rights I should have a colleague here. Let me see! Who is there that I can get at to-night who would be apt to enjoy such an opportunity as this?” And the old surgeon meditated over the matter, and deliberated as an epicure would deliberate before sending out invitations for a feast which promised to be fit for an emperor’s enjoyment.

“I can’t think of a single soul I would care to have. I must go on by myself, then, but it is really almost as bad as for a man to sit down and get drunk in solitude.”

Then there came a quick ring at the door-bell.

“Hallo, hallo!” cried the old gentleman, becoming a little alarmed immediately. “I hope that isn’t the police! It would be awkward if the scoundrels have blundered and brought the officers down upon me!”

Such a thing had happened once and a deal of money it had cost the doctor to hush up the matter.

He stole cautiously to the front room—the study was a back room on the second floor—and raising the window cautiously peered out.

The alarm was a groundless one; a single old gentleman, with snow-white hair, that trailed down upon his shoulders, and a very long white beard, with a valise in his hand stood on the stoop.

There was something about him that seemed familiar—something in the face and figure, and yet the doctor could not place him. He called out:

“What is it, sir? What do you require?”

“Ah, is that you, Daniel?” asked the old man, looking up so that the doctor could get a good view of his face.

The voice the doctor recognized immediately, for voices do not change like faces and figures. The huge beard and long hair had disguised the one—an acquired stoutness the other.

But, now that he had spoken, the doctor knew him at once. It was his old chum at college, his partner when he had first commenced to practice, his warm and steadfast friend of later years. Gayaway Philcard, a student and a scholar, a man who had both the theory and the practice of medicine at his fingers’ ends.

“Bless my soul! Is that you, Gayaway?” the doctor exclaimed in astonishment. For over ten years the old gentleman had neither met nor heard of his old friend, but now, at the very moment when he was wishing for a chum to enjoy with him the rich professional treat which was before him, up springs the man, above all men, who would enjoy such a thing. It really seemed as if he had come in obedience to the doctor’s wish.

The doctor hurried down-stairs and admitted his visitor, whom he greeted in the warmest manner.

“Where on earth have you kept yourself for this age?” he exclaimed, as he conducted the guest into the sitting-room, and assisted him to remove his outward wrappings.

“Well, I have made the tour around the world, and on my way, of course, I came through India, and by the favor of one of the native princes whom I succeeded in curing of a slight illness, I was put in the way of finding out some things that few Europeans have ever known.”

“Well—well—well!” exclaimed the old doctor, his professional feelings at once aroused, and he shook his head as he looked down with envious eyes at his old friend.

“Yes, nothing would this prince be satisfied with but for me to go with him as his court physician, and as the kingdom over which he ruled was away in the interior, in a district rarely visited by Europeans—all white men are Europeans there, you know—I accepted the post. I was anxious to see this almost unknown country with its many wonderful plants possessing fabulous virtues, after the old story of the Peruvian bark, you know; and then, too, I wanted to see the doctors of the region on their native heaths, and see how they compared with

us outside barbarians. Well, to be brief, I spent eight years with this prince; I learnt the language so that I could speak it like a native, wore the dress common to the clime, and passed for a native with one and all, except a few who knew my secret.”

“And you encountered the native doctors—you learnt all about these marvelous plants, eh? and did you make any valuable discoveries?” exclaimed the old doctor, on the tip-toe of expectation.

“Well, no, nothing to speak of. I have a few decoctions that will be useful in the same line as the Peruvian bark, for malarial fevers. That being a country where malaria rages, of course, all the native doctors pay more attention to that than to anything else.”

“But their skill, my dear Gayaway, does it amount to anything?”

“In the fever line, yes; outside of that they are all a set of wretched botches; but, as a race, the Hindoos have the most wonderful patience and a great knowledge of the virtues of the many plants their land boasts, but I must say that, as far as I could discover, and remember, nearly all their efforts are devoted to discovering subtle poisons and the remedies for the same. That probably comes from the old state of affairs when there was almost always a war going on between some of the native princes, and in these wars the poison-cup and the assassin’s dagger always play a more prominent part than the sword and gun.”

“Ah! then you probably have some rare tales to tell of these mysterious poisons?”

“Yes, for want of better occupation I studied them thoroughly, and I flatter myself that there isn’t a man living to-day, European or native, who knows more about them, although of course the knowledge is useless; but I became interested in the subject, and so I mastered it thoroughly.”

“It was like you; I am not surprised. If you remember, you and I were the scholars of our class. Well, my dear old friend, I too have been studying in my old age. At a time when other men are beginning to lay down their burdens, you and I, with young hearts, although old heads, take up new ones.”

The other wagged his head and the cheerful sparkle that came in his eyes made them look as bright as the eyes of a boy.

“It is extremely lucky then, my coming at this opportune time. In what direction have your researches extended?”

“A preserving fluid!” replied the old doctor, lowering his voice, as though he feared that some one might overhear the words.

“The secret of the Egyptian mummies?”

“Oh, no!” exclaimed the other, disdainfully. “What object to preserve a body in that dried-up state? The idea of that secret is mere child’s play compared to what I am after. My object is to take the body and by injecting a certain fluid into the veins cause it to retain a life-like appearance, and at the same time preserve it from decay.”

“But is there not a process of embalming after that idea already in use? It occurs to me that I have heard something in regard to it, in England?”

“Oh, yes, it was used here during the last war. Quite a number of our prominent soldiers, who fell on the field, were embalmed and their bodies brought on to the North so that their funerals might take place here amid their friends, but that is a very costly process, and merely a temporary one. It is not expected nor intended to stand the test of years. There is where the novelty of my idea comes in. My process is cheap; a quart of fluid, costing perhaps five dollars, with a syringe and a knife to puncture a vein, will be all that is required. The operation is perfectly simple—a child, ten years old, can perform it. It will do away with all these expensive funerals; undertakers and sextons will find their occupations gone; graveyards will be at a discount, and the tombstone men will cut their throats in despair. A hundred years hence, if this thing is the success which I think it will be, the man of position and standing when he wants to make a visitor acquainted with his ancestors, instead of taking him into a picture gallery and showing a lot of wretched daubs, by courtesy termed portraits, not one of which gives you the least idea of the person for whom it is intended, will take the guest into a room where, in glass cases, every one of his ancestors sits preserved, exactly as he was in life! What do you think of it? Won’t it be a superb thing—a perfect revolution?”

“Yes, if it can be done,” replied the other, a little doubtfully.

“It can! I will show you this very night. Come up-stairs. I’ve a subject up there all ready for the experiment now!”

The doctor conducted his visitor into the study and threw back the cloth from the upper part of the body—he had been careful to replace it when the bell rung—and, at the same time, catching up one of the large knives, pointed in triumph toward the victim of the White Band’s fearful plot.

“There!” he cried, “what do you think of that? Isn’t it grand?”

CHAPTER VIII.

A LITTLE OF THE PAST.

AND now, in order that the reader may have a full understanding and be able to hold firmly in his mind the threads of our story, it will be necessary for us to retrace our steps and relate a certain incident which occurred to Doctor Diamond just after his visit to the wretched quarter where Mrs. Eldon died.

The doctor had proceeded straight to his home, his mind busy with thoughts of the strange scene in which he had been an actor.

Like an angel of light the young girl had appeared before him, and for the first time in his life he felt that he had something worth living for.

He was not willing to believe that it was possible fate would throw such a glorious creature in his way only to tear them asunder after they had learned to love each other, for this cool, sober man, noted from early youth for being old beyond his years, was as wild with his passion as a hot-headed boy of eighteen, and nothing doubted that he could secure the love of the woman whom he had only seen once in his life.

He ascended the steps of his house, applied the latch-key to the door, opened it, entered and turned to close it, but was prevented, because a woman, who had followed him with noiseless steps, stood right in the doorway.

She was a tall lady, muffled in a dark cloak which covered her from head to heel, and her face was hidden by a heavy black veil; but, dark and dense as was this covering, it did not hide the brilliant pair of eyes that flashed beneath.

“You are Doctor Diamond, sir?” the lady questioned, in a rich and well-modulated voice, which, to the acute ears of the man, betrayed that the speaker was a lady by birth and breeding.

“Yes, madam.”

He did not call her miss, for her figure made him believe that she was no school-girl.

“Will you grant me a private interview, please?” she asked. “I will not detain you long.”

Doctors and lawyers are the father-confessors of about one-half the world, and so Diamond was not surprised at the request.

“Certainly,” he replied, although convinced, notwithstanding her cloak and veil which acted as a complete disguise, that she was no patient of his. “This way, if you please.”

He conducted her into the little front parlor, turned up the gas, which was burning dimly, placed a chair for his caller, then closed the door.

Seating himself and removing his hat he said:

“Now, I am at your service.”

With a hand that evidently trembled, much to the doctor’s astonishment, the woman removed her veil.

A proud and beautiful face was revealed—a patrician beauty. She was a brunette with the most brilliant black eyes imaginable—a woman who might be thirty, perhaps five years older than that, and possibly ten—evidently reared in the lap of luxury and used to power and command.

The veil raised she fixed her brilliant eyes inquiringly upon the face of the doctor and to Diamond’s fancy there was anger in the look.

“Well,” said the lady, after quite a long pause, finding that the gentleman did not speak.

The doctor was mystified; she evidently expected him to begin the conversation, although what she could possibly imagine that he would have to say to her, a perfect stranger, was a puzzle to the doctor.

“What is the nature of your business, madam?” he finally demanded.

“Oh, you are inclined to treat me as a perfect stranger, then?” she exclaimed, with a sarcastic accent, her beautiful eyes flashing fire.

“How else should I treat you?” the doctor returned, amazed.

“But we are not strangers.”

“No?”

“We have met before, although years have elapsed since then.”

“It is possible, madam, but I must say that I do not remember to have ever had the pleasure of meeting you, and I feel sure that if we have met I should remember you, no matter how many years had intervened, for such a face as yours is not easily forgotten.”

“Now, you speak as you did in the old time when you swore so solemnly that I was the most beautiful woman in the world, and that earth possessed not a creature who could ever cause you to forget me!” the woman cried, anger plainly apparent in both face and voice.

The doctor stared, and then, bending forward, he cast a keen and critical look into her face, a scrutiny which she instantly understood.

“Oh, you wish me to think that you suspect I am out of my senses, eh? but I know better; you know who I am, and this pretended ignorance will not avail you in the least. Look in my face and then say that I am crazy, if you dare!”

The doctor accepted the challenge, but, after a good, long look, he shook his head.

“No, madam, as far as my limited skill can

judge you are in full possession of all your senses, although I must admit that I am utterly at a loss to account for your strange language, or to explain it except under the supposition that you are laboring under a hallucination."

"Enough of this trickery!" cried the visitor, impatiently. "Let us not fence with words; and, in the first place, let me set your mind at rest. I do not come to do you any damage. Heaven knows I have suffered wrongs enough to make me seek for revenge, but I do not; I am content to let the dead past bury its dead. You ruined all my young life; you could not make reparation for that even if you were so inclined; but I, who know your vile nature so well, understand only too well that it would be but the height of folly to expect you to do what was right when you could just as easily do wrong, so perverse is your nature. You plunged me down into a perfect hell, taking advantage of the love which, in my fond ignorance, I imagined would raise me to heaven. The only good deed you ever did, as far as my knowledge extends, was when you deserted me and fled like a thief in the night. You left me to ruin, despair and death, but the Great God that rules our destinies did not design that for my love I should suffer the torments of the damned. With His broad hand He raised me from my low estate and gave me back again to the life from which your destroying touch had plucked me. And then, when I was once more in the sunshine, when I had means to enable me to use the machinery of the law, which is supposed to move for justice, but which in reality seldom stirs except when impelled by gold, I searched for you. But not for vengeance, although I had cause enough. With the devilish skill, which is so great in you that at times it really seems like genius, you evaded the search, until at last I gave up the effort, trusting to the chance of accident to bring us together again. And I did not trust in vain. Accident did favor me after an elapse of ten years. I met you in the street, recognized you immediately although you have changed somewhat, and actually look younger than when you first ensnared me some thirteen years ago. I caused you to be tracked, and now that you are fairly hunted down, I come in person to make my demand. Your disguise was skillfully chosen. In the humble, obscure doctor, Alcenor Diamond, who would recognize the once dashing favorite of fortune, who was wont to carry it with so high a hand? But the chase is ended; I am here, either as a friend or a foe, as you choose to have it. First, I will plead; then, if you think it wise to brave me, I will demand. John Frenier, give me back my child!"

If the doctor was affecting the ignorance which his face expressed, then in truth he was a most wonderful actor, for he was doing it to the life.

"Madam, it does not seem possible to me that you are in any way disordered in your mind, for, apart from your story, I cannot discover any evidence of mental disorder; therefore the only explanation of your singular conduct is that you are laboring under a terrible mistake," Diamond said, with slow and measured accent, his old calm, half-sorrowful way returning to him.

The lady shook her head energetically, and firmly compressed her rich red lips together; she was not to be put off in this way.

"Have patience and let your own judgment decide," the doctor continued. "I am not the person you take me to be; I have never seen you before in my life, and thirteen years ago, the date you fix upon as the time of our meeting, I was nothing but a boy, barely eighteen; I am just thirty-one now; and in this very house and neighborhood I have lived for the last ten years."

"And that is the reason why I have not been able to find you!" she exclaimed. "I did not for a moment dream that you would be content with a meek and lowly station; I looked to see you flaunting it with the best of the land, as was always your custom—a vulture tricked out in eagle plumes."

"Madam, will you not listen to reason?" the doctor pleaded, still patient; "examine the evidence I produce that I am not the man you take me to be."

"What evidence?"

"The testimony of the neighbors hereabouts that I have resided here for the time I have mentioned."

"There isn't any doubt in my mind in regard to that; I am willing to accept that statement for truth. It was twelve years since we parted—since the night when you fled—deserted me—left me to go straight to the bottomless pit, as you doubtless desired I should, for I was without money or friends, and what door opens in this world for the unfortunate girl with the suspicion of a taint upon her name except the gilded portals that belt the gates of hell?"

"The facts in regard to my life before that time can be easily ascertained," the doctor declared, still endeavoring to reason calmly with the woman.

"Speak; I will listen!" And the simple sentence carried with it the implication, "Go on,

and see how quick I will rend the lie to pieces, that you are concocting."

"I commenced practice as a physician in this house, ten years ago, just after my graduation."

"And where did you study?"

"At a private medical college in St. John's, New Brunswick."

"And by writing thither I can easily ascertain whether your story is true or not?"

The doctor was silent for a moment; for the first time a peculiarity of his position occurred to him. The institution to which he referred had been destroyed during the great fire which a few years ago nearly devastated the city of St. John's; it had never been reestablished, and the chances were that not a single soul connected with it could be readily found.

Briefly he explained these facts, adding that his diploma would show that his statement was true.

"Oh, you are the arch-fiend of deception himself!" she cried, in contempt. "How nicely events occur to suit your purpose! You have the diploma, as if such a thing was not easily forged! But, there is one proof of your identity which you cannot destroy. Remove your coat and roll up the shirt-sleeve of your right arm!"

The doctor started, surprised—amazed, and a hot flush came over his pale face.

"Why do you wish me to do that?" he at length demanded—the words falling slowly from his lips.

"You do not dare to do it and then attempt to deny that you are the man I say you are, for upon the inner part of your arm, just below the elbow, pricked in with India-ink, is the symbol of two serpents twined together, with uplifted heads and threatening jaws. Come, sir, proceed!"

"It is useless; there is such a mark upon my arm," the doctor replied, with icy calmness, "and yet, I am not the man you say. My name is Alcenor Diamond; I have never borne any other, and I know you not."

"It is to be war then?" the woman exclaimed, rising in heat.

"Of what avail is it for me to own to a lie?"

"It is my child I want, John Frenier!" she cried, impulsively, suddenly changing her tone and extending her arms imploringly—"the helpless little thing that you stole from me, and for whom I have vainly searched for twelve long years! Oh, are you so utterly bad as to attempt to keep a mother from her young? I am rich now; I can give my darling everything. I am powerful, too, for the great ones of the land are my friends, and they will back my quarrel. Refuse to listen to my appeal, and, by the Heaven that made me, I vow that I will crush you to the dust though you were ten times the cunning devil that you are!"

"Woman, will you not believe my words?" Diamond cried, springing to his feet, greatly agitated. "I know you not, I tell you I know you not!"

"Ten days, ten days to yield my darling, and if you refuse, then look to yourself!" And with this threat the woman departed.

CHAPTER IX.

A LIBERAL OFFER.

OUT into the court Hoppergrass rushed, much to the astonishment of Mistress Mulcarthy.

"Heaven be good to us!" she cried; "the bye is crazy! The tin dollars has put him clean out of his mind!"

But Hoppergrass still retained full control of his senses and shrewdly suspected that some deep mystery lay at the bottom of this strange affair.

Why should the girl hurry off in this manner, and what had become of the body of the mother?

The more he puzzled over the question the greater his perplexity.

If the girl had only been gone ten minutes, as the Irishwoman declared, it might be possible that she was somewhere in sight down the street, but when he emerged from the court, to his great disappointment she was not to be seen.

Denny Stump, the one-legged beggar who had an apartment in the corner house, whose front door was on the street, was sitting on the stoop enjoying a pipe before proceeding to his usual avocation, and, noticing the boy, naturally asked him what he was looking for, "as wild as a goose with two heads."

"For Miss Eldon; you know that handsome gal wot lives with her mother up the court?"

"Faix! ye'll look a long time afore ye see her ag'in, I'm thinking."

"Did you see her when she went away?" asked the boy, anxiously.

"I did that same, and the old woman, too, I believe."

"Why, she's dead."

"And who sed that she wasn't?"

"How could you see her, then?"

"I saw the box she was in."

"Did the funeral men come?"

"They did! Sorra a taste of lie is there in that; a nice hearse, too, as if she had been wan of the quality."

"This morning!" cried the boy, bewildered and unable to understand what it all meant.

"Yis, sur, and there was a foiner carriage, too, for the gurl, and an illigant gentleman. They brought the old woman out in a foiner coffin, good enough for the President, then the gurl got into the carriage with the gentleman and away they wint."

"Old gent, or young gent?" asked the boy, more for the sake of asking questions than anything else.

"Well, he might be older, and then ag'in he might be younger," was the rather unsatisfactory reply, "but he was wan of the nobbs, I tell ye! Mebbe it's a brother, or somethin' of that kind, come back from furren parts wid lashings of money?"

"Mebbe so," muttered the boy, and then he walked slowly up the street.

"Something wrong in all this," he concluded; "'tain't right; I know that it ain't!" The remembrance of the wild words of the young girl was yet fresh in his memory; she spoke of a sacrifice she had made and how it had come too late!

It certainly was very mysterious, and the boy, whose street-life had made him old beyond his years, puzzled over it, earnestly. The girl evidently had departed early in the morning, for the express purpose of avoiding all comments upon the action, and her giving the few trifling articles in the room to Mrs. Mulcarthy, was proof that she did not intend to return.

Hoppergrass had very few friends, and it was but natural he should grieve over the loss of the one whom he prized the most; and then, too, the boy had some "wild and whirling" thoughts in his mind in regard to the girl, which he had never dared to translate into words. He was looking to the time when he should be the happy and prosperous proprietor of a dog-house, and the income from the "plant" should run about ten or fifteen dollars a week. Then he had made up his mind that he would extend a son and a brother's protecting arm to the old woman and the young "gal," and when he got a little bigger, why, if the maid, who appeared to him to be fully as beautiful as any of the angels whom he had heard people talk about, hadn't seen a "feller" to suit her fancy, he would try his luck.

Of course the idea was absurd, but it did not so appear to the gamin; so the vision gave him courage to toil and to suffer.

As he trudged up the street, utterly disgusted at this untoward event, the thought entered his head that it would be a good idea to consult Doctor Diamond. He had, apparently, taken quite an interest in the girl, and the boy had a very high opinion of the doctor's skill and sagacity. So he proceeded directly to the physician's house and rung the bell.

A pleasant-faced, middle-aged woman answered the summons; this was Mrs. Conventon, the doctor's housekeeper.

"The doctor is not in," she replied, when the boy had made known his business. "He did not come home last night at all. I suppose he has been detained by some urgent case of sickness."

The boy pondered over the matter for a minute; his newspaper business required his attention; but, as he had fallen heir to the unexpected windfall of eight dollars—for he did not suppose that the doctor would charge over two dollars for his visit, and might not require any fee at all, as he had not been of any service, he concluded that he could afford to play the idler for a part of the day at least; so he told the lady that, as he wanted to see the doctor on very particular business, he guessed he would wait.

The housekeeper, amused by her caller's odd manner, talking as he did with all the deliberation of an old man, asked him to walk in and wait, but the boy declined the offer and said that he would prefer to wait outside, so the woman closed the door and left him in possession of the stoop.

Now Hoppergrass, thinking that he might have some time to wait, prepared to make himself comfortable. He went across the way to the baker's and invested in a penny roll, then from the grocer's next door he bought two cents' worth of cheese, returning to the steps he sat down and munched away at his breakfast with all the relish due to youth and health, but kept a keen watch around him to see what was going on.

A lady, well-dressed, "Fifth avenue style, clear through," as the boy observed to himself, on the other side of the street attracted his attention by the peculiar manner in which she glanced over at the doctor's house, and then at him, as she passed down the street.

"I guess she will know me ag'in when she sees me," the boy muttered, not over-and-above pleased at the scrutiny, and began to suspect something wrong.

"I ain't done nothin', nohow," he continued; "she needn't look at a feller that way as if she was trying to 'spot' him. I never seed her afore, and I'll bet high on it too!"

The lady, who was dressed in black and with a heavy veil over her face, walked slowly down

the street to the next corner, then she crossed the avenue and came back on the same side that the doctor's house was on.

Hoppergrass had not lost sight of her for a moment, and when he saw her coming up the street directly toward him, he began to get frightened; a vague suspicion haunted his mind that he was about to be accused of some wrongdoing and his first impulse was to take to his heels and run, but he resolved to stand his ground.

"So help me Bob! I ain't done nuffin to nobody!" he muttered; "I ain't a-goin' to skoot when I ain't done nuffin, nohow."

The boy's suspicion was correct; the lady had returned for the express purpose of speaking to him.

She halted in front of the steps, and Hoppergrass looked curiously up into her face; about all that he could distinguish through the thick veil which concealed it was a most brilliant pair of black eyes, and such a pair of diamond-like eyes he thought that he had never seen before; they seemed to fairly look one through and through.

Under that piercing gaze the boy felt decidedly uneasy.

"This is Doctor Diamond's house?" the lady said, speaking in a deep, musical voice which seemed to the gamin sweeter—sweeter than any voice he had ever heard, even than the bell-like tones of Dura Eldon.

The sign affixed beside the door of course answered the question, so the lad very naturally inferred that the inquiry was merely for the purpose of opening a conversation with him.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Hoppergrass, ducking his head.

"Do you know the doctor?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Is he in?"

"No, ma'am; I am a-waitin' for him now."

"Are you well acquainted with him?"

"Known him a long time, ever since I was so high," and the gamin with his hand indicated the altitude of about two feet, from which it was to be inferred that the acquaintanceship commenced at a very early age.

The lady hesitated for a moment, cast a rapid glance up and down the street as if debating some question in her mind, and then, in an evidently repressed voice, said:

"As you know the doctor perhaps you can give me some information about him. Will you come with me? I will pay you well," and the lady held up a silver dollar.

The boy's eyes sparkled; evidently he had got into a streak of luck.

"All right, ma'am; I'm the boy wot kin do it!"

CHAPTER X.

AN ASTOUNDING DISCOVERY.

"Now, then, old fellow, come! Your judgment upon this case!" Doramus continued, in rapture, without giving the other a chance to speak. "Isn't it grand? Did you ever see a finer specimen?"

The look in the eyes of the guest showed that he shared the professional ardor of his friend; a better "subject" than the insensible form lying so still upon the marble slab had never fallen into a doctor's hands.

The savant from India coming close to the table examined the body with great interest. The clothes had been removed, for the captain of the White Band had been careful that his men should remove everything that might lead to a discovery as to who the man was; they had even cropped the flowing locks of the victim close to his head, thus in a great measure changing his appearance so as to render recognition more uncertain. The body was fully exposed from the head to the waist—the upper part of the sheet, which had completely covered it, having been thrown back by the old gentleman upon introducing his friend.

"You are right, Daniel; it is really superb," the savant observed—"a magnificent subject; a young man, too, right in the first flush of youth. Why, he ought to have had forty years of life before him. Of what disease did he die? I see no indication of any; as far as appearances go, he was perfectly healthy; in fact, in a condition to fight, run or work for his life."

"Accident caused his death—he was drowned. You have no idea how much trouble I had to get him—cost two hundred dollars! Of course for such an experiment as the one I am about to make I wanted a first-class subject."

"Drowned, eh?" and the white-bearded doctor approached still nearer and poked the body with his finger, examining it in a very critical way.

"Yes, so the party said with whom I made the bargain, and from what he stated, I got the idea that it was a friend of his, probably a member of the gang, for of course there must be a gang of these body-snatching rascals."

"Daniel, do you know that I have a suspicion about this affair?" the old savant observed.

"Eh, what do you mean?"

"I don't think that this man was drowned; have you examined the body at all?"

"No, it had just arrived when you came—not five minutes before you." And then Doramus came quite close to the table, took out his spectacles and adjusted them.

"The body doesn't present the slightest appearance of the man having come to his death in that way. In fact, Daniel, to give you my honest opinion, I don't believe the man is dead at all!"

"Not dead?" cried Doramus. "By Jove! if that is so, I am out two hundred dollars, for I didn't bargain for a live man!" Then bending over the body he examined it carefully.

"Well, what do you think?" the other asked, when the doctor raised his head and shook it slowly, a sure sign that he was greatly perplexed.

"You are right; this man was never drowned."

"My own thought exactly; but do you think that he is really dead?"

"Well, as to that, I confess I am puzzled, but if it is not death, what is it? A trance, think you—merely a case of suspended animation? Although the signs of death are here, yet from the peculiar appearance of the body one would be led to think it not really death itself."

"As a professional man, would you be willing to give your sanction to the burial of such a body as this?"

"No, I would not—decidedly I would not. In such a case I would recommend delay. I would advise that the body be kept until the state of it rendered it certain that death had ensued. I am quite sure that a great many people have been buried alive, simply from undue haste. Cases of this death-like trance are much more common than the world at large have any idea of, or ever will have."

"But there are some peculiar things about this body which lead me to think that it is not a trance either," remarked the old savant, seriously.

"But if it is neither death nor a trance, what is it?" asked Doramus, amazed.

"A case of suspended animation produced by artificial means."

"Aha! you suspect that there has been foul play, then?"

"Either that or an attempt at suicide. Notice the rigidity of the muscles of the mouth; that is not natural. How long has this man been in this state?"

"The fellow said that he was drowned five days ago. He explained that he was a 'pal' of his and that they were on the river at night, a 'pleasure excursion,' you know, for the purpose of stealing whatever they could get their hands on. I presume this man accidentally fell overboard; he was rescued, but too late; he was taken on board in an insensible condition and never revived. And, as the man had no relatives or friends, this fellow who told the story, added, with a grin, that he thought he might as well make an honest penny by selling the remains."

"The story is a lie; the man hasn't been in the water at all. A state of coma like this might be produced by the inhaling of bad air—the gas in a coal-pit, or the foul vapors at the bottom of a deep and neglected well, but in such cases, death would surely follow suspended animation, if the exposure was continued long enough."

"My dear colleague, how then do you think that this has been produced—by the use of a drug?"

"Do you know of any that would produce such an effect?—I am assuming of course that the man is not dead, only in a state of insensibility and that the natural functions of nature can be restored to their normal condition."

For a few moments Doramus pondered over the question; then at last he shook his head.

"No, sir, I do not; I speak of my own knowledge, of course, and am not basing my opinion at all on the vague traditions, if I may term them, common to our profession that there are, or have been certain things, drawn from the vegetable world chiefly, which, administered to man, would produce a stupor greatly resembling death, and from which after a lapse of time, long or short according to the strength of the dose, the patient would wake to life again. These drugs are not known to us medical men of the present age, and I confess for my part that I am much inclined to believe them stupendous lies, put forward by the ancients to gull a credulous and ignorant world."

"Then from the fund of your experience you doubt the poet's tale of Juliet drinking the sleeping draught so that, in a supposed state of death, she might be conveyed to the tomb of the Capulets, there to wake and join her lover?"

"A beautiful fiction, but a fiction only."

"You mustn't tell that to one of the learned barefooted savans of India."

"And why not?" The doctor understood that this was the prelude to an important disclosure.

"Because he would immediately entertain a very poor opinion of our knowledge and be quite certain that our *materia medica* was not as complete as it ought to be."

"Now comes one of the secrets that you

wrested from the native sages, eh?" exclaimed Doramus, greatly interested.

"Yes, and the most important one that the whole land of India possesses in a medical way. As I have told you, the most persistent and important researches of the native doctors have been in the poison line. A subtle poison, that could be easily administered in either food or drink without the danger of detection—without the fear of exciting the suspicions of the partaker, and which would leave very little trace afterward, and would be certain to cause death, was what the native physicians were all searching after. And it was found, too—how many years ago, of course, it is impossible to tell. The secret was handed down with scrupulous care from father to son, and to-day, even, after the lapse of years, there are not, probably, ten men in the country who are able to prepare the drug, or have any knowledge in regard to it, and yet it is derived from one of the most common families of plants known to man—a wide order though, which gives to man the fig, the mulberry and the hop, to the tropics, the famous bread-fruit, and in South America the milk-tree of the carosus, whose bland juice feeds the natives; some of the species furnish caoutchouc, india-rubber, and yet the almost fabulous upas tree of Java, whose poisonous exhalations are death to all who dare to penetrate into its valley, is a member of this same family; from one of the humblest of the order we get the material which, after being prepared by human skill, we use for strangling rascals."

"I understand; you refer to the order Urticaceae; a very interesting family indeed, and it is a well-known fact that some of the members are provided with a poisonous juice, and in others a highly narcotic principle can be developed."

"Exactly; well, from one of the humblest members of this family, a low-growing shrub, found only in almost inaccessible jungles, growing always in a morass, near the water, some of the native doctors have procured a drug, wonderfully powerful in its action. After a great deal of trouble I learned the secret. The plant is plucked, roots and all, placed in a closely-covered crucible, such as chemists use, covered with water and exposed to an intense heat until the contents are reduced to almost nothing; then the stuff is taken out and exposed to the rays of the sun on a metal plate until the liquid—the plant is entirely dissolved in the boiling operation—crystallizes into a mass like common salt, without either smell or taste. This is carefully bottled. A grain placed in water dissolves instantly, leaving not the slightest trace behind, or it can be reduced to a fine powder and be sprinkled on a dish of food like common salt, but the action when taken within the system is as certain as death itself. In its operation it varies of course according to the quantity taken; a small amount produces drowsiness followed by sleep, and if the dose is repeated often enough, finally a sleep is induced which becomes a trance, or if a sufficient number of the grains be taken the trance-like sleep is produced almost immediately, all functions are suspended."

"And the patient dies?"

"Yes, if the trance cannot be broken, and in nine cases out of ten the unlucky individual upon whom the drug is tried is buried alive. He is supposed to be dead, of course, as he does not show any signs of life. The native doctors believed that the drug did cause death; they had not the skill to distinguish between a trance and actual death. I think that I may claim for myself the honor of being the discoverer of the fact that the drug did not cause death but only insensibility—apparent death. Of course it answered their purpose for they buried the man all the same."

"And you believe that this man has been drugged by this strange medicine?" and he pointed to the body.

"I do, most firmly, improbable as it seems; and, what is more, I think I can wake him to life again."

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNDERSTANDING.

It was a very quiet funeral and the men who had charge of the affair really wondered.

Everything had been done in good style, the remains interred at Greenwood, the great, silent city of the country, the bills not only paid promptly, but paid in advance, which was something that had never happened to any of them before.

But, there were only two mourners and the minister. The clerical gentleman was well known to the professional men, the occupant of one of the richest up-town churches; it was not often that he assisted at any funeral that was not first-class in all respects.

It was a strange affair. The two mourners, a lady and gentleman, were well dressed—the gentleman particularly so—and evidently people of standing.

The funeral rites were finished at last and the mortal remains of "Martha Eldon, aged 50," were consigned to the care of the damp earth, the minister shook hands with and uttered a few consoling remarks to the bereaved daughter, after the fashion of his cloth, affecting as

deep a regret for the departed woman as though he had known her all his life and the world had not held for him a nearer or dearer friend; then he got in his brougham which was in waiting and went home to dinner, oppressed all the way with the fear that he was late and that the joint would be overdone.

Dura Eldon looked more beautiful than ever in her mourning robes, although her face was very pale, but no tears flowed from her eyes even when she heard the heavy clods of earth falling with a dull thud upon the coffin, and each sound seemed like a blow struck at her very heart; but, she had suffered so long, had wept so much that the fountain was dry and dull despair had taken the place of active sorrow.

The gentleman who accompanied her was a remarkable-looking man; he was tall, finely proportioned, an elegant figure and an expressive face. He was dark in complexion, looking like a foreigner, had jet-black eyes and hair, a silky mustache and imperial of the same hue, a rather full face, with that peculiar expression upon it which seems to indicate that the owner is a good liver and addicted to the pleasures of the table. In brief, he was one of those rare men who had the faculty of making friends out of strangers without any particular trouble. As we have said he was elegantly dressed, and it was not so much the richness of his garb as the style in which the articles were chosen, fashioned and worn. His jewelry, too, was superb without being gaudy; in fine, he was not overdressed in any particular.

After the minister had departed the girl stood motionless by the grave, watching the men fill up the cavity in a dazed, stupid manner.

The gentleman looked at her for a moment; then a peculiar expression came into his eyes, and he slightly compressed the corners of the extremely resolute mouth that the drooping mustache almost completely hid. Evidently he did not like the look upon the girl's face.

He touched her on the shoulder.

"Miss Eldon, had we not better withdraw?" he asked, in a voice which was very low, very musical and which possessed a slight foreign accent. "This is a painful scene and the longer you linger the more unpleasant it will become."

"As you please," the girl replied, turning, mechanically, away from the grave and placing her hand within his offered arm.

He led her to the brougham which was in waiting; no hired carriage this, but an elegant private establishment—the vehicle, an imported one by a Parisian maker, the harness from London, the horse a Kentucky thoroughbred, and the coachman, a dignified young man in a rich livery, who, with his smooth, sanctimonious face, looked much more like a theological student than a coachman. Certainly the owner of this establishment was a man of exquisite taste.

"Home," ordered the gentleman to the coachman after he had assisted the lady to enter; then he got into the brougham, the man mounted to the box and away they went.

The home of this gentleman was on a par with the rest of his surroundings, although not very imposing-looking on the outside, being only a small two-storied brick, but it was in a first-class neighborhood on one of the side streets up-town, one of the old cottages built before the up-town march of fashion and brown-stone fronts.

There was a small garden in front, something rare in that part of the city, and a narrow passageway by the side of the house led to a little stable in the rear.

Alighting from the carriage the gentleman conducted Miss Eldon into the house. The butler, a rather large man with a thin, gray beard, and the same peculiar expression upon his face that the coachman wore, met them with the intelligence that dinner was ready to be served.

At first, Miss Eldon begged to be excused, saying that she had no appetite, but upon her companion representing to her that she was really not doing justice to herself without taking a mouthful of something after her long ride, and a glass of wine, at least, to nourish her, she consented to eat.

Dura was like wax in the hands of this stranger, and she yielded at once to his desire; she went up to her room, where the French maid who had been employed to wait upon her, speedily prepared her for the dining-room.

The woman was a large, buxom person, very quiet and well-trained, as all the people connected with the house seemed to be, performing her duties almost without words, a very miracle of a servant.

The meal was eaten in almost utter silence, for the gentleman understood of course that the lady was not in a mood for conversation, and therefore he did not trouble her, merely calling her attention to the different dishes as they were served as if to coax her to eat.

But the terrible affliction which had fallen upon the girl had utterly destroyed her appetite, and, in fact, the blow was so heavy that it seemed to have dazed her.

Her companion watched her with the great-

est attention, while apparently not noticing her at all, and although his face was one which, from long training, had acquired the difficult art of concealing what was passing within the mind of its owner, yet, in spite of this, one used to the man would have readily detected that he was not only perplexed but annoyed by the girl's manner.

When the meal was ended he addressed the girl.

"You must take good care of yourself; you must not give way to grief, you know. You have received a heavy blow, certainly, but it is the course of nature. We cannot live always, and few of us would want to, I am thinking, if we could. You must bear up, and when the violence of the shock has passed away, and you have sufficiently recovered to talk on business, we will discuss some matters that may be of interest to you in the future."

"Why delay?" observed the girl; "let us discuss them now."

"But do you think you are in a proper condition just now? You will pardon me for saying it, I am sure, but you really seem as if your head was affected by this heavy misfortune that has befallen you."

"Do not fear in regard to that; if I could have become insane I would most certainly have been affected on the night when my mother died. I survived that shock with reason unclouded, and there cannot be any greater one for me in this world."

"If you are willing, perhaps it would be as well."

"Act your own pleasure, but as far as I am concerned, I am quite agreeable."

"We will discuss the matter at once then; possibly it will relieve your mind, turn it upon other subjects than your sad affliction."

The girl silently bowed her head in assent.

The two rose from the table and the gentleman led the way to the library, which was a cosily-furnished little room on the first floor in an extension of the house.

The gentleman was very particular to close the door after the girl entered.

"To such a conversation as ours is likely to be it is important there should be no listeners."

Again the girl nodded assent, although from her listless manner it was plain that she took but small interest in the matter.

"There!" he said, after closing the door; "there isn't any danger of any one overhearing what we say; I have as well-trained and as good servants, I am certain, as there are in the city, but servants will be servants, you know, and it is but human nature to be more or less curious."

Then he drew a chair up to where the girl had seated herself and sat down.

"The blow which fell so suddenly upon you was so heavy, and your sorrow was so great, that appreciating your grief I refrained from speaking to you until you had time to recover from the stroke, and I am afraid that even now I am rather hasty."

The man was exerting himself to his very utmost—using all the power in his nature to conciliate, to please, to magnetize the girl, for already he began to be afraid that this silent, wax-like girl, so superb in her glorious beauty, was one to require all his arts to conquer her. She still remained cold, impassive, a woman of ice rather than warm and living flesh.

"Oh, it matters not. I may as well hear what you have to say now as at any other time."

"But I fear I will fatigue you; it will take some time and you have not had an opportunity of recovering from the weakening effect of your long vigils by the bedside of your dying parent," he urged.

"As you please; but I am ready to listen, and I assure you I feel perfectly strong."

"Now, in the first place, in regard to your position in this house," he said, drawing his chair still closer, and speaking in the most confidential manner.

For the first time an expression different from the one of blank indifference which had rested so constantly upon the girl's face passed over it. It was as if the near proximity of the gentleman was distasteful to her.

His quick eyes caught the expression, and in an instant guessed its meaning.

CHAPTER XII.

WHO HE WAS.

"My position in this house?" she repeated, and as if she did not quite understand.

"Yes; I am a bachelor, living here alone and without any lady relatives in the house; in fact, the only two women on the premises are the housemaid and the cook. Naturally to bring you here, a young lady of your remarkable beauty, without offering a reasonable explanation, would at once have excited gossip. From the servants it would soon have spread around among the neighbors, but, right in the beginning, I took measures to prevent any idle surmises as to who and what you were. Of course I was obliged to have recourse to fiction, but a fiction which does not harm any one, and is used purely for a good purpose cannot be so

very wrong. I announced that you were a relative, a cousin, whom I had not seen since you were a child, and that misfortune having come upon you, inasmuch as both your parents had been rudely torn from you by death, I had determined that henceforth you should make your home with me."

The girl simply bowed her head; the statement was a plausible one and she was content, although from the way she felt it did not matter much to her what any one said.

"You must remember, you know," he continued, "that in reality I know almost absolutely nothing whatever about you, and therefore in putting forth any statement I was venturing on dangerous ground. I knew, of course, that your name was Dura Eldon; that your mother's name was Martha Eldon, and that your father was dead; furthermore, that you were the most beautiful girl I had ever set eyes upon, and now that I have had a chance to make your acquaintance, I have learned that you are as good and accomplished as you are beautiful."

But, not the slightest effect did this compliment produce upon the girl; her eyes were cast down upon the floor, and she really did not seem to notice what was being said. That he could not look into her lovely face, and watch in her glorious eyes the effect of his words, annoyed the man, decidedly.

"My family history is soon told," she said, after quite a long pause, raising her eyes from the carpet, but not fixing them upon his face, as he wished she would, but upon his long, white hand, which rested upon the arm of the cushioned chair in which he sat, as if there was a sort of a fascination in the costly diamond ring which blazed upon the little finger. "I was born in Virginia; my father was the only son of an only son, and my mother was unfortunate enough to lose all her relatives by death, so that I grew up absolutely without kindred, my father and mother excepted. My father was in business in Richmond, Virginia; he was unfortunate, failed, and his creditors took all. Broken down by hard work and by great mental labor brought on by his long struggle against adverse circumstances, he came to New York, hoping in this great city to get a fresh start, but on the way here he took cold, and not being in any condition to resist disease, died soon after we arrived. Thrown thus upon our own resources in a strange city my mother and myself had a terrible task to secure the bare means of living. Both of us were expert with the needle, and just as we were reduced to our last crust we succeeded in obtaining work, but the struggle had been too severe for my poor mother; she sickened and died. The rest you know. You see the story is an extremely simple one."

"And then you really have not a living relative in the world?"

"Not one."

"How strange! It is my own case exactly."

"Yes?"

"Not a soul in the world to claim kindred with me, as far as I know. Now, if I were a believer in the science of attraction, I might think that the fact that we were both so situated was what attracted me to you."

The girl did not reply; she was still staring at the hand as if there were some fascination in the lustrous diamond, the light from which was not half as brilliant as that which sparkled from her eyes.

"Now that I know who you are it is only fit that I should return the compliment and let you know who I am," he continued, finding that she was not inclined to speak. "My name you know, Adolph Lescant, and that I am a gentleman of fortune and position, as I assured you when I first had the honor of addressing you, by this time you are probably convinced, since you have become acquainted with my surroundings. I own, frankly, that I am rather inclined to be a little odd and eccentric in my ways; if I were not so, I, in all human probability would never have had the pleasure of becoming acquainted with you. Just by chance I met you in that obscure quarter of the city in which you resided—I will not say in which you found your home, for the place from which I rescued you was certainly not a home in any sense of that sometimes much abused word. You are a beautiful girl; I do not say it to flatter you, for to simply speak the truth ought not to flatter any one; besides, you know it, for you are a sensible woman. Although you were poorly clad, and lacked all the aids which go to make even beauty attractive, you attracted me. I was seized with a whim to follow you; I am and always was a slave to impulse, and so I obeyed the whim. From your neighbors I easily learned who you were and how you were situated, and then I determined to act—as I have acted. I came to you, frankly told you that you were the most charming woman that I had ever encountered, and that I would gladly pay my addresses to you if you would permit it."

"And I, rendered desperate by the condition of my mother, and not caring what became of myself, agreed to sell myself to you! You see, I, too, speak frankly. For the money to purchase medicine and necessities for my mother, whereby I imagined her life might be pro-

longed, I agreed to give myself to you whenever you should claim my hand. I was mad—utterly out of my senses! I thought not of myself; I thought only of my suffering dear one, and for her sake I was willing to sacrifice myself!" the girl exclaimed, with rapid utterance, evidently waking from her dreamy state of sorrow.

"It was a noble act, Dora!" the man cried, warmly, just as if his very soul was kindled into enthusiasm by the girl's behavior, but, somehow, she fancied that there was a hollow ring to the speech and that the admiration so openly expressed was not true, but merely lip praise, that came not from the heart.

"Yes, my dear Miss Eldon," Mr. Lescant continued, "you have no idea how much I was delighted when I discovered that in addition to possessing a most lovely face and form you also owned a heart capable of so noble an action! It was a sacrifice, of course; I was an entire stranger to you; but, now that we have become acquainted, I hope you will consider that being united in marriage to a man like myself, who even in this brief interval which has elapsed since we became acquainted, has learned to love you for the many noble qualities which you possess, it is not really such a sacrifice, unless indeed your heart is given unto another."

The speech was skillfully framed to learn the truth, for a suspicion had entered his mind that perhaps the girl was in love with some one and now that she had had time to reflect upon the matter repented of the decision which she had made.

"No; if I had given my love to another I should not have accepted your offer. My eyes had never rested on the face of any man in whom I took the slightest interest when I first met you."

This assurance took quite a weight from the mind of the gentleman, for he knew enough of womankind to understand that he would have a most difficult task in winning the girl if her affections had been given to any other man.

"I am delighted to hear it," he remarked. "I really feared that there might be some previous love affair in the way which would interfere with my suit; but, now that you assure me you are heart-whole, I can see no reason why in time I cannot succeed in winning the priceless jewel of your love. I am odd and eccentric, as I have told you—the result probably of the life I have led, for my career has been as wild as the wildest romance. As you have doubtless guessed from my name, I am of French descent, although born and reared in this country, in the city of New Orleans. My father was a wealthy sugar-planter, and when I was quite a lad he took me to France where he had rich and powerful kindred. His ambition was to prepare me for a great career. I was educated at a military school and when I was old enough, through the influence of my father's friends, I secured a position in the army, and then, when he had thus seen me fairly started on the road to fortune, he died. I had neglected to mention that my mother left this busy world when I was an infant. After my father's death, lacking his restraining hand and counsel, I became quite wild, as was only natural for a youth of my age. Being one of the best swordsmen in the French army it was not to be wondered at that I should sometimes become involved in quarrels, as hot-blooded boys are apt to give and resent affronts, real or supposed."

"The fatal issue of a duel with an officer of far superior rank to my own, compelled me to seek the safety of another clime, and so I became a soldier of fortune, just like the adventurers in the olden time, selling my sword to the highest bidder, and in time it happened that I came again to this country and threw my sword into the scale of war on the Mexican side at the time of Maximilian's invasion of that land. Being a trained soldier and well-versed in the art of war, I speedily rose in rank, and at the time of the usurper's downfall I commanded one of the principal corps in the Mexican army, and was honored with the title of the Duke of Durango."

"But Mexico, you know, my dear Miss Eldon, is a land of revolution—of sudden changes, and although she owes her victory over the invaders almost entirely to the foreign swords and skill enlisted on her side, yet among the natives there is a widespread dislike—I may say hatred—to all foreigners, and so it happened that some five years ago I was accused of being engaged in a conspiracy against the Government, and I was really obliged to fly for my life, for I realized that I would receive scant justice and less mercy at the hands of my foes. Knowing the country and its inhabitants so well, though, I was prepared for this disaster."

"I had been engaged in mining speculations which had paid me remarkably well, but had taken the precaution to send all my money to this country; therefore, when my enemies came down on me like wolves on the fold, and I was obliged to fly like a thief in the night, owing my safety solely to the speed of my horse, instead of stripping me of everything I had in the world, as was their amiable intention, they got comparatively nothing. Thanks to my pre-

cautions I arrived in this city a rich man, and here I have remained, waiting and watching for the chance to return to Mexico, when my friends get the upper hand, as they will be sure to do before long, to resume my former power and position. You see, my life reads like a chapter in a novel, and, probably, because I have led such a life is why I am different from the ordinary run of men. Now you can account for my strange freak in taking such a fancy to you, an utter stranger. I have explained how I am situated and what I have been, so that you will know all about me, just as if you had known me for years."

The girl lifted up her head abruptly, and for the first time looked the man full in the face, and in her eyes he read that his endeavor had failed, and that he had not made the least impression upon her.

"You have been very kind, indeed, to me, and now I beg you to perform another act of kindness; release me from the promise that I gave you! The sacrifice was a fruitless one; my mother died before a single penny could be spent to save her, and now that I am all alone in the world and I contemplate what I have done, the thought appalls me!" and as she spoke a shudder shook her frame. "I fear that I can never learn to love you, and oh, to what a life of misery then you will condemn both of us! Be generous, be merciful, and release me from the terrible consequences that must follow the fulfillment of my word. The money that you have expended I will pay back, every penny of it, for I am expert with my needle, and now that I know where I can get work, I can easily support myself and pay off the debt besides!"

The appeal was an affecting one, and Lescant was visibly moved by it. He shook his head slowly and a mournful expression appeared upon his face.

"Have you reflected upon the hardship, toil and privations of such a life?" he asked. "Just think of what you will have to suffer; think of the ease and luxury you fly from, the only drawback to which is the society of the man who fairly adores the very ground you walk upon."

The girl dropped her eyes to the floor again with a despairing gesture.

"You will not release me?" she murmured.

"Not at present," he replied, soothingly; "you really must take time to consider; you must give me time to win your love; if I fail, then, perhaps, I may agree."

A sigh came from the girl's lips. Her words were true; the silken chain had become an iron one.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MARVELOUS OPERATION.

"Do you really think, then, my dear old friend, that you can restore this man to life?" Doramus asked, with excited earnestness. "I say restore him to life," he continued, "for if he is not dead now, he is so near it that it is but a spark that is left."

"You are quite right, it is but a spark," the other responded, gravely, "and what renders the case still more painful is the probability that this unfortunate fellow, although apparently as destitute of life as if he had been dead a twelvemonth, really comprehends all that has been going on around him."

"I see, I see," Doramus exclaimed. "The drug affects the animal powers only; the mind works on unimpaired, even while animation is absolutely suspended and dormant."

"Exactly."

"By the memory of Galen! my dear colleague, I was wishing for some such man as yourself so that I might have a witness to my experiment; you come; and now, behold! instead of my astonishing you it is you who will astonish me."

"I may not succeed; my prognostication may be wrong; the man may not be laboring under the influence of this Indian drug, but this result may have been produced by natural causes. Of course upon the face of the matter it appears to be the most unlikely thing in the world that the man could have been affected by a drug which it is extremely difficult to procure even in India, being worth many times its weight in gold; in fact, I feel almost certain, as I have already stated, that there are not ten men in that land who know the secret of its preparation. But, whether it is the Indian drug or something else which has caused this, I will try to resuscitate him."

"And the process?" demanded Doctor Doramus, as anxious as a school-boy over a new game.

"About the same as the mode of reviving life in the drowned. I shall merely use the galvanic battery. By a series of shocks of increasing intensity, if life is not wholly extinct, it can be aroused to reaction; once make an artificial nerve circulation and the natural will follow; then the functions of the heart and lungs, by gentle friction and movement, can be made to reassert themselves. Minute quantities of brandy must then be forced into the

stomach and warmth given the body by heated woolen blankets, if there is the least sign of life."

"To it at once, then! Here is a galvanic battery," and the old doctor hastened to produce the battery from the instrument closet. "There's a fine brand of brandy in that clear bottle, yonder, the one with the death's head and cross-bones upon it, labeled poison—a device of mine to keep the servants from helping themselves to it. Brandy at twenty dollars a gallon is too expensive to feed servants upon."

"But stop, my dear doctor! In the first place, had we not better ascertain whether the man is merely comatose, or actually dead?"

"What test do you prefer?"

"The cut is the simplest; with the lancet make a slight incision anywhere—the fleshy part of the fore-arm is as good a place as any. If the man is dead, the cut remains closed, but if, on the contrary, there is life in the body, it gapes open, as a wound naturally does."

"Yes, yes;" and immediately the old gentleman whipped out his lancet, and made a slight wound upon the powerful right arm of the man who was lying so motionless and still. The old doctor was feverish with impatience. To raise a man from the dead was even better than embalming his body.

The servant also drew near; he was deeply, anxiously interested.

The sharp blade of the lancet pierced the white skin, and slowly the wound opened.

"Aha! there is life in the fellow, yet!" Doramus cried, in exultation.

"Yes, it appears so."

"And you think you can revive him?"

"I think I can—that is, I am basing my belief on my success with a somewhat similar case in India, although, of course, this prostration may not have been produced by the same cause."

"My advice is to go ahead exactly as you did in India."

"I will." And without more words the two men set to work.

The galvanic battery was applied; the rubbing and the kneading of the body, inducing artificial respiration, were pursued; brandy was passed into the stomach by means of a throat-pipe, and after twenty minutes of labor the result was—

SUCCESS!

Little by little the warmth of life came back, and the influence of the powerful drug which the man, apparently doomed to certain death, had taken in order to mitigate the agony of his fate, was passing away.

As the physician had surmised, it was the subtle agent for secret destruction which the patient Hindoo sages had created from the apparently harmless weed, that the victim had taken, and the reader will probably remember by what combination of circumstances it had come into his possession. If it had been a potent poison nothing on earth could have saved the partaker from death; it was not a poison but a somnolent that simulated death; so the draught that was intended to destroy proved Alcenor Diamond's salvation; and a good Providence willed that he should fall into the hands of, probably, the only man in the world who could revive him from the deathlike trance.

At last the man opened his eyes, very slowly though, and gazed up into the anxious faces hovering over him.

"Are you conscious of what is going on around you?" Doramus asked.

The man opened his mouth as if to reply, thus clearly indicating that he was conscious, but evidently too weak to speak.

"Don't try to speak!" admonished Doramus, quickly. "I see that you understand, so it is all right." Then he turned to his colleague: "I guess you were right; I think his mind has been working all through this suspense and he has comprehended all that has occurred around him."

"No doubt, no doubt; the native prince whom I saved assured me that it was so in his case; the body is inert, but the mind remains alive and active."

"Well, nothing more remains to be done but to nurse him into strength again."

"And you will have to play the host for at least a week."

"Yes, yes; but I'll keep an eye upon him. The rascals who brought him here said he was a pal of theirs, so we may, after all, have only restored a great rogue to the world again." This in a low voice.

"Oh, don't you believe that. That face is the bond of an honest, upright character, or I'm no judge of physiognomy. The wretches, more like, have made him a victim to their infernal diabolism, as you'll soon learn," stoutly averred the sagacious veteran in medicine.

"Perhaps so; and I'll help him along to give him a chance to get even with the scoundrels if they have done this," returned Doramus.

With great carefulness the two doctors removed the helpless form from the operating-table to a bed in one of the old physician's spare rooms, and after they had made the man comfortable they sat down at the other end of the room for a chat.

"By Jove! I never thought of it!" Doramus exclaimed, suddenly.

"Never thought of what?"

"My embalming process; where am I to get another body and how about my two hundred dollars?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PROPOSAL.

LIKE all the street boys Hoppergrass was a firm believer in luck; there were lucky days—days when he disposed of all his newspapers without any trouble—and unlucky days when he was "stuck" with ten or twelve copies, thus practically eating up all his profits, and therefore, when in addition to the windfall which had come to him through Miss Eldon's generosity, the strange lady held up a silver dollar as an inducement for him to tell what he knew about Doctor Diamond, he was quite sure that this day above all other days was going to be a lucky one for him; so he gladly followed the lady up the street.

When she came to the next corner she turned it and the boy trotted on after her.

In the middle of the block, close to the curb of the sidewalk, a small, neat brougham was standing with a coachman in plain clothes on the box.

"You need not get down, John," the lady said, as she came up to the carriage and the coachman rose in his seat with the evident intention of dismounting and opening the door for her. "And I will give you warning when I wish you to start, which will not be for some little time, as I want to talk with this boy first." Then the lady opened the door of the vehicle and motioned for the boy to get in, but he hung back, not knowing exactly what to think about this proceeding. He was suspicious, naturally enough, for all through his brief life he had found people much more ready to do him harm than good. And he had ten dollars, too, in his pocket—a fortune to him, and the idea flashed upon him that "mebbe" some one had heard of his wealth and this was a plot to wrest it from him. Therefore very doubtfully indeed he looked at the carriage and the lady.

The lady saw at once that the boy was suspicious.

"Do not be afraid; no one will harm you," she said.

"I dunno," Hoppergrass replied, with a shake of the head; "you might carry a feller off, arter you got him inside of that hearse."

"And why should I carry you off, my little man?" she asked, really attracted to the boy by his shrewd face and honest way.

"I dunno."

"And what would I do with you after I got you?"

If the boy had spoken what was in his mind he would have answered, "Take my ten dollars away from me;" he contented himself with another "Dunno."

"There is not the least cause for alarm. I merely want you to enter the carriage so that I can talk with you without exciting attention, which we would do if we remained in the street. Believe me, I have no wish to do you harm; on the contrary I will befriend you if you will do as I wish."

The boy hesitated no longer; he was conquered; there was something in her voice that went straight to his heart; so into the carriage he got and the lady followed him.

It was an odd contrast, the poor, miserable little boy with the ragged great-coat covering him all up from neck to heels, and the elegantly-dressed lady sitting opposite to each other in the vehicle.

After entering and closing the door carefully behind her the lady threw up the thick veil which she wore, and the boy had a good view of her face. To his notion he had never looked upon a more beautiful one, not even excepting Miss Eldon's lovely features. An altogether different kind of beauty of course. Miss Eldon was the kind of girl whom he would like to marry when he got big and was prospering in the world, but this lady—why, she was to be respected and worshiped like a sort of a queen.

"What is your name?" asked the lady, gazing curiously upon the intelligent face of the boy.

"Hoppergrass, ma'am."

"That is your nickname, I presume, but what is your right name?"

"Never had any other that I knows on."

"Oh, but you must have had some other name; that is no name at all."

"It's the best I've got."

"It means grasshopper, I suppose, and was probably given to you when you were quite little because you were lively and smart."

"Mebbe; never was called anything else."

"But what is the name of your parents?"

"Ain't got none."

"But what was their name?" the lady persisted. "You have had a father and mother at some time, you know."

"Mebbe I did," responded the boy, but very doubtfully.

"But don't you know anything about your parents?"

"No ma'am; I never heered tell on 'em at all;

sometimes I think that mebbe I am like the nigger gal in the theater play wot never had no father or mother, and never was born, but jest growed," observed the boy, with a humorous twinkle in his bright eyes.

"Who brought you up?" she asked, deeply interested in the story of the lad, for a page like this from real life was something that she had never before encountered.

"Oh, an old Irishwoman named Biddy Murphy, who had three more children, all bigger'n me, and she said that I was her son, too, but I know that I wasn't; there ain't no Paddy-whack 'bout me! And the rest on 'em, too, all had real red hair and blue eyes, and I've got brown hair and eyes; 'sides, I wasn't like the other boys at all."

"Where are the others now?" she questioned.

"Oh, I don't know much about them; I don't travel with the same gang at all; they ain't good boys, ma'am; they lie, and swear, and steal, and the 'cops' have had 'em up afore the 'beaks' two or three times, and they were h'isted up to the 'Island' for the good of their health. I staid with Mrs. Murphy until I was about ten years old; used to sell papers with the rest on 'em, you know, and give her the money, and got mighty little to eat, too, 'cos she spent all the cash for rum as fast as she got it, and then, 'cos I didn't make money fast enough, she tried to get me to learn to pick pockets from an old blind beggar who lived on the same floor with us in the old barracks down on Cherry street; he used to be on that lay, and 'cos I wouldn't do it she took to walloping me, so I jest cleared out and set up on my own hook."

"You are a smart boy and I hope an honest one."

"Well, ma'am, I tries to be, 'cos I know that them that lies and steals never prospers, for they are sure to get nabbed some time; and then, somehow, when I've seen a good chance to make a grab and run and nobody near to catch me, I couldn't bring myself to do it."

"That is right; always be a good boy and you will get on; and now, in regard to the doctor; you know him?"

"Oh, yes; mighty good man too, I guess; all the folks down in the court where I hang out speak well of him; they say that he is a first-class saw-bones; and he don't pinch quarters till the eagle squeals, either; some of the doctors, you know, when they come to see poor folks want their money in advance; no money, no doc."

"He is liberal then?"

"Yes, he trusts—gets skinned mighty often, too, but it ain't the fault of the poor coves; when they ain't got the ducats, they can't pony up."

"Do you know anything about the doctor, more than that his name is Diamond, and that he is a doctor?"

"Well," replied the boy, debating the subject over in his mind, "I don't know much of anything 'bout him, 'cept that he is a doctor, and that he is a pretty square man, and that he ain't been home since last night, and that the lady wot takes care of his house, says that she guesses that he will be home this morning, 'cos he didn't leave any word that he was going away for any time."

"Ah!" exclaimed the lady, evidently excited by the intelligence, "he has not been home since last night! Now, what does that mean?"

The question was addressed much more to herself than to the boy, but he took occasion to answer it.

"Guess he is attendin' to some sick people, ma'am."

"Or has he proceeded to put himself at once upon the defensive, anticipating my action?" she murmured.

Hoppergrass stared, for he did not understand what she meant.

"Would you like to earn quite a little sum of money?" she asked, fixing her brilliant eyes upon the boy's face.

"Jest you try me!"

"Here is a dollar to commence on," and she placed in his hand the coin with which she had dazzled his eyes when she had accosted him as he sat on the stoop.

"Much obliged, ma'am. What am I to do—is it easy?"

"It is not very difficult, but you must keep silent in regard to the matter, and you must not let any one know anything about it."

"Oh, I'm jest as close as an oyster, ma'am, when I'm told to be."

"I take a great interest in this Doctor Diamond and for certain reasons I desire to know all about him, where he goes and who he sees, either by night or day; I want you to follow him as closely as his shadow, and, above all, be careful not to let him discover that he is being watched. If he should make that discovery it would ruin everything. Then you are to come to me and report all that you have ascertained. Do you think you could do this?"

The boy, it was easy to see, was very much perplexed. He stared at the glistening coin in his hand, then he looked up irresolutely in the lady's face and then down at the dollar again.

"What is the matter?—why do you hesitate? Do you think you would not be able to accom-

plish the task?" she asked, finding that the boy hesitated to speak.

"Oh, yes, ma'am; I reckon I kin do it; it ain't so orful hard for a snipe like me to dodge a man; I guess I could do it and not get ketched, but I ain't got it into my wool wot you want it done for yet," and as he looked her square in the face the expression of gravity upon his features was decidedly comical.

"But that is my business," she said, slowly and not unkindly—"that is, if I understand what you say aright."

"All I want to know is wot you want me to foller him for, that's all."

"But that hasn't anything to do with it; you are paid to do the service, and it is naught to you why I wish the service performed."

"Oh, yes, it is, ma'am!" with a shake of the head.

"How can it be?"

"Mebbe you want to find out about the doc so as to fetch him a lick somehow."

"Do him a mischief, eh?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, suppose that is the truth, what of it?"

"I guess, then, you will have to get some other boy; I don't keer for the job."

"Why—why can't you do it?"

"'Cos I don't think it would be right for me to go back on the doc. He's a real square man, ma'am. I come arter him last night to attend to a poor sick woman who was a-dying, and she didn't have any money, either, to pay doctors, and I didn't have any, too, and I didn't think it was right to fool the doc, so I up and told him what kind of a lay-out it was, but it didn't bluff him off a bit. No, ma'am; he came right along down to our miserable old court—Hell's Kitchen, ma'am, is what they call it—jest as if he had been going inter the Fifth Avenue Hotel and I was the kid of the proprietor. He didn't ask a cent, and, ma'am, I couldn't go and spy on a white man like that, and mebbe get him into trouble; so take back your dollar; it ain't no good to me, now."

The lady looked at the lad for a moment, and then she clasped both her hands over his little palm, pressing the dollar.

"Keep the money, my boy, for your honesty," she exclaimed, "and Heaven grant that this man has not many friends as devoted to his service as you are, for if he has, I never shall be able to accomplish my purpose. Go, now; I will not forget you, and, at some future time, I will see if something cannot be done for you."

She opened the carriage-door and Hoppergrass got out, the most astonished boy in New York.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BIG JUDGE.

The chief of police of the great city of New York sat in his private office; with him was one of the most prominent of the police judges of the metropolis.

The person of the superintendent is so well known that it is not worth while to describe him, but of the "Big Judge," as he was commonly called, it may be as well to give a brief description, for he is to play quite a prominent part in our narrative.

He was a tall, portly man, really very imposing-looking, with carefully oiled blonde hair, and a long beard of the same hue; the beard lent an air of dignity to the face, which would have been lacking that quality without the hirsute appendage.

As well known as any man in the city was this gentleman, Alexander McQuencher by name, since he was one of the most successful politicians of the day.

A judge, yet no lawyer; judge of only a police court it is true, yet, somehow, it seems that the judge who daily disposes of the liberty of his fellow-beings ought to be as well informed in regard to legal matters as his learned brother who simply decides in regard to dollars and cents, but, as a rule, any politician is thought to be good enough for a police justice.

To use the language of the pave, McQuencher was a "corker" of a judge; small mercy did the unhappy wretch receive who was unfortunate enough to be brought before the tribunal over which he presided. The press spoke of him as being severe yet just, and when the solid men of the metropolis—men who had something to lose, and who dreaded the arts of the spoiler, read in the journals of the day of the rapid way in which the Big Judge disposed of the criminals brought before him, they exclaimed—"That is the kind of man to have on the bench; he doesn't let the rascals escape!"

And no more did he—the small ones, although enemies of the Big Judge, compared his court of justice to a net whose meshes were amply sufficient to hold the little fish, while the big ones easily broke through; but the tongue of slander spares no one; and the higher the position of the assailed, the more bitter the attack.

These insinuations did not ruffle the judge in the least; the community at large believed in and applauded him; his political power was great, and it was understood that he had "feathered his nest" pretty well during the past ten years, having enjoyed the pickings of some fine, fat offices.

The judge and the police superintendent being on the best of terms, the politician had called upon the chief in behalf of one of his constituents who had got himself into trouble for not being as scrupulous in regard to another man's property as he might have been.

Black Jack this man was called, so termed because his name was Jackson and because he was almost as dark-skinned as a negro; and perhaps, too, on account of his reputation, which was unsavory in the estimation of all decent citizens.

"How about this Black Jack affair?" the judge asked, as the usual salutations were over.

"Oh, we have got him this time," the chief responded, evidently with satisfaction.

"Well, I am really sorry, for I was in hopes the case against him was not a clear one."

"Ah, yes; I forgot that the man was in your district—one of your 'heelers,' eh?"

"Yes, the fellow has always worked like a beaver for me, to give the devil his due; and my fellows say he is worth a dozen ordinary men on election day."

"Well, judge, the way the thing looks now, I reckon he will not do much work around the polls for some time, for the chances are that Sing Sing will take care of him for two or three years to come."

"It is a pretty bad scrape then?"

"Yes, indeed; house-breaking with an attempt to kill. He, with a pal, 'cracked a crib' up on the avenue, but the noise they made in getting in woke up one of the servants who alarmed the house; there were plenty of people in it, and being armed they attempted to capture the burglars, but Jack and his pal fought their way to the street, and that they didn't kill some of the folks was no fault of theirs. On the street they encountered a policeman; his attention had been attracted by the row inside, and he had rapped for assistance; he tried to force the fellows to surrender, but Jack made a dash at him, and although the officer fired, the bullet only wounded Jack in the arm and the officer was floored with a lick that made him see stars for a couple of minutes. But the whole neighborhood was alarmed, and after a hot chase for eight or nine blocks the two were captured."

"Well, I am really sorry for it," the Big Judge declared. "A gang of the boys were at my house this morning about the matter. Of course they declared that it was all a mistake—that the police were down upon Jack, and had accused him of this crime in order to get a chance to railroad him to State prison. In fact, they were so earnest that I had to tell them I would come to headquarters and see you in order to get rid of them."

"The case stands just as I have told you. The proof is conclusive and nothing but death can save him from going up the river."

"Well, you understand my position. Of course, when the boys got after me I had to tell them that I would do all I could for the man."

"Oh, certainly; it would not do to get the boys down on you, and election coming on, too. In such a district as yours a man must stand well with the gang or there would be a mighty poor show for him. If it was any little common case of assault and battery or anything of that kind, why, something could be done; the case could be postponed, and the fellow got off under bail; but that dodge won't work here. Black Jack is booked for Sing Sing and salt won't leave him."

The entrance of the official messenger at that moment interrupted the conversation.

"A gentleman wants to see you, sir, on particular private business."

"Personally?"

"No, sir; he merely asked for the chief of the secret service."

"Think it amounts to anything?"

"No, sir; he's a queer-looking chap—looks like a foreigner, and I kinder got the notion that he ain't exactly right in his mind. I tried to find out what his business was but he wouldn't bave it."

"Just step behind the screen yonder, judge; take your chair with you and sit down for a few minutes until I get rid of this chap. You would really be astonished at the number of these queer customers that come bothering me and no one but the chief will do for them."

The judge took his chair and retired behind the screen.

"Now show the fellow up and I'll see what he has to say for himself."

The messenger retired.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CLEW.

THE applicant was a well-built man, rather poorly dressed in dark clothes, with an olive-tinted complexion, and yet with light hair, and it was this fact that gave the strange appearance to the face, for with such a complexion the hair should have been dark.

The chief was a keen observer, though, and had also traveled a great deal, and once in his life he had encountered a man who in this particular resembled the visitor. It was in New

Orleans—a waiter at the St. Charles Hotel—a fellow who looked enough like a white man to be one, and yet was not, for in his veins ran a strong current of African blood; therefore the moment the officer got a good look at the man he suspected that he was from the South.

"You are the superintendent of police?" asked the caller, when the door closed behind the messenger.

"I am."

"I have taken the liberty to call upon you because I have some very important information which I think will be of great value to you."

"Glad to see you, sir; take a chair."

The stranger, seating himself, seemed to reflect for a moment and then spoke:

"I think, sir, I have a clew, which, if carefully followed, may lead to the detection of a powerful band of law-breakers."

The chief was all ears in an instant.

"That is important information indeed!" he exclaimed. "Mr.—Mr.—How may I call your name?"

"My name?" and the man appeared to be perplexed by the simple question.

"Yes," and the chief drew a sheet of paper to him and seized a pen ready to take notes.

"Is my name necessary?"

"Well, no; not particularly, at present, although it would be as well that I should know it—that is, unless you have a good reason for wishing to remain unknown."

"No, I do not know why I should endeavor to remain unknown. My name is Clarke—Marvin Clarke."

"Exactly," and the official wrote the name down with a flourish. "And now, Mr. Clarke, you say that you have important information in regard to an organized band of law-breakers?"

"Yes, of experts in all kinds of crime, from the highest to the lowest degree."

"Proceed, sir."

"My information in regard to the band is not as complete as I would like it to be, but, probably, when my store of knowledge runs out you can supply the deficiency."

The chief nodded and looked wise; this was a part of his stock in trade; whenever he was ignorant of any matter and wished not only to conceal the fact but to convey the impression that he knew all about it, he simply held his tongue and put on a knowing look, and by this device had often succeeded in getting criminals to make a full confession of their misdeeds, actuated by the belief that the chief had a complete knowledge of their affairs and that it would be useless for them to attempt to disguise the truth.

"This band is composed of leading rascals of all grades, bound together, I presume, by oaths after the style of a secret society, and I think beyond a doubt that most of the great crimes, which have plunder for the object, can be traced directly to the members of this band."

"I haven't the least doubt, sir, that your information is correct in that particular. I have been aware for some time that such a band existed, but the rascals have managed matters so shrewdly that it has been impossible to get at them in any way."

"I think I can give you a clew to one of their meeting-places."

"Ah! If you can—just the slightest clew—you can depend upon my men following it up."

"They have a rendezvous in the vaults underneath an old church, somewhere in the suburbs of New York. The church is a very old one, dating back, probably, to the Revolution and the chances are that it is now deserted—not used, and is little better than a heap of ruins. It is only a short distance from the water, and from the shore an underground passage leads to the vaults."

"Your description is a very indefinite one," the chief observed. "The city is entirely surrounded by water. Can't you fix the locality more closely?"

"The probabilities are that the church is near the Hudson river and about two hours from the city by boat."

"Steamboat, you mean?"

"No, by oars."

"Eight or ten miles, then, according to tide?"

"Yes."

The official reflected for a moment. He was well posted in regard to the city and its surroundings but no church could be think of that answered the description. He shook his head.

"I am at fault," he remarked; "I do not recall any building that would fill the bill on either bank of the Hudson within fifteen miles of the city."

"It may be possible that it is on Staten Island, or the Jersey shore, or on Long Island."

"I know about every foot of the ground, I think, around New York in all directions within twenty miles, but your old church stumps me."

"It exists, though, superintendent, and it is the principal headquarters of this band of bold and lawless men. I know that such a band is in existence; I know they have their headquarters in just such a place as I have de-

scribed, and in this vault is a golden coffin worth a fortune."

The police chief started in surprise, despite his iron-like nerves.

"A golden coffin? By Jove! I have heard of that before!"

"It is in the vault; and now, chief, will you not put your men on the scent, using care, of course, not to reveal the purpose? Let them seek for the old church with a large vault under it, a hundred years old, at the least."

"Why do you not try your hand?"

"Such is my intention, and I will report to you my progress, say three days hence," said the stranger, rising.

"All right, and in the mean time I will set my men at work," and the chief pulled out his handkerchief to remove a speck of dust which had got into his eye.

The stranger, standing with his hand on the back of the chair, could hardly repress a start of astonishment.

From the handkerchief of the chief came the same perfume that had clung around the form of the captain of the White Band when he had doomed the prisoner in the vault!

CHAPTER XVII.

A PECULIAR VISITOR.

HE was an odd-looking, roughly-dressed fellow—a sort of a mixture of a sailor and a landman, and in the darkness of the night he came slouching along up the street toward the house of the retired physician, Doctor Doramus.

Decidedly unprepossessing was the man in every respect—one of the kind of fellows that the prudent would be apt to avoid when encountered by night in a lonely spot. And, from the peculiar manner in which he skulked up to the door, and the suspicious way in which he looked around as if afraid some one was watching him, a careful observer would have been certain that the fellow either was on some evil purpose bent or else he had been following evil ways so long that fear of being apprehended had grown to be a second nature.

The housemaid who answered the bell summons, a comely young Irish girl, was not naturally very acute, but, dull of comprehension as she usually was, something in the man's face warned her that he was no better than he should be, and when he asked if Doctor Doramus was in, and said that he wanted to see him if he was, the housemaid cast just a single glance at the two overcoats hanging on the rack in the hall, and remarking, curtly, that she would tell the doctor, shut the door in the visitor's face—a proceeding which immediately excited his ire.

"You blasted fool, I ain't on the overcoat-sneak-thief lay!" he ejaculated, shaking his fist at the closed door. "I'm a gentleman, I am! and when I 'crack a crib' I do it in a gentlemanly manner, and no sneaking about it, either."

The appearance of the doctor, who came immediately in answer to the summons, cut short the fellow's reflections.

"How are you?" saluted the stranger, with a clumsy attempt at a bow; "kin I have a few words with you in private on some very 'ticular business?"

The doctor cast a searching glance at the man; he fancied that he had seen him before, although for the moment he could not remember where or when.

"What is the nature of your business?" the doctor asked, unfavorably impressed by the ill-looks of the fellow.

"Oh, well, governor, I can't tell you that out here on the stoop, you know. You can bet your pile that I am on business, every time, and if you ain't willin' to ax me inter yer parlor, I can't make you, and will have to go 'way, in course, but I take it that a gentleman like you are ain't a-goin' to be hard on a poor cove wot only wants to have a leetle private confab with you on very 'ticular business."

"Business that concerns me?" Doramus questioned, sharply.

"Well, yes, governor; it consarns you a little, but not so much as it does me."

"It occurs to me that I have seen you before, somewhere."

"Wery likely—wery likely, governor," the fellow answered, with a grin.

"When was it and where?"

"Deed, governor, you're too much for me," the man responded, with a dubious shake of the head. "I ain't got no memory at all to speak on."

"Well, come in and explain your business," said the doctor, leading the way to the reception-room, satisfied that there was very little to be got out of the caller unless allowed to go on in his own way.

Doramus placed a chair for the man so that when he sat in it the full light of the gas would fall upon his face; then he sat down in his arm-chair and signified for the stranger to proceed.

"I'm a 'longshoreman, I am," the man began, "and my name is Jerry Crank; and I had a brother, and that brother was"—at this point he paused, abruptly, and looked around him in a very suspicious sort of way; then in a cau-

tlous tone, barely above a whisper, he asked—"I say, governor, there ain't any danger, is there, that anybody kin overhear a cuss—wot he says, you know?"

"Not the slightest danger of any one overhearing if you are careful to speak in a moderate tone of voice."

"All right; I will try wot I kin do in that line, but I've got a voice like a bassoon, 'cos I've been used to yelling on the water; mebbe you kin see that I am a seafaring man?"

The doctor nodded; there was a flavor of the sea about the fellow.

"My brother and me allers used to travel together," continued the visitor, sinking his voice to a hoarse whisper. "We follered the sea fur years, but lately we have bin loafin' round New York, picking up odd jobs in 'longshore line, and we were out on the river one night, and the first thing I knows, Bill—that's my brother, governor—he had been h'isting in the 'blue ruin' pretty freely and had got more cargo on board than he could stow—well, he went to catch an orange that was floatin' past and over he went, and, governor, he couldn't swim a lick, either. I dropped the oars and went for him with a boat-hook, and I got him, too, yer honor. I pulled him into the boat, but it was too late; the salt water on top of the rum had finished him; poor Bill had slipped his cable and made a port in another world."

Here the man halted and rubbed his eyes with his big, pawlike hands as though troubled by tears, but the keen-eyed doctor couldn't discover any trace of emotion in the fellow's stone-like face.

"Yes, sir," the man continued, "poor brother Bill was done for when I got him into the boat. I did the best I could to fetch him up ag'in but it was no-go. Well, governor, not to worry you with too long a yarn, when I got on shore, I fell in with a bad gang, reg'lar rounders, you know, up to all sorts o' things; not that I ever had a hand in their tricks, 'cos that ain't the kind of man I am. In course, feeling all cut up by Bill's slipping his cable, I warn't sorry to h'ist a little rum on board, and when I got 'bout half-seas over, some of the gang said as how I could make a trifle out of Bill and save the expense of planting him in the cold ground. Well, I ain't got much l'arning, yer honor, and not being in a right kind of way for thinking anyhow, I consented, but now that I am sober, the thing kinder goes ag'in' me, and I reckon that I would feel better if I took Bill's body and had it planted like a Christian."

"It would be natural for you to do so, and I haven't any doubt that you would feel better."

"That is what I have bin a-thinkin'; so, governor, if you will be so kind as to tell me when I kin have Bill I'll come arter him and plant him as good as if he had bin a lord."

The doctor stared in amazement at his visitor for a moment; then he put on his glasses as if he desired to examine the face of the man more closely.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid, governor," the man remarked, in a very mysterious way. "I'll fix it so that there won't anybody know anything about it at all. In course I don't want it until you get through with it, 'cos you paid your money like a gentleman for it, but arter you get through, way you might as well let me have it as anybody else, 'cos it will save you trouble, of course, as you will have to get some one to take it away."

"My good man I do not understand you at all!" the doctor exclaimed. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"The stiff," replied the fellow, in a hoarse whisper, "the stiff wot you bought the other night and gave two hundred dollars for, you know—wot you ordered."

"You have made some mistake; this is not a medical college!"

"Do you s'pose I don't know that? But I say, governor," and here the fellow's tone changed to one of entreaty, "wot is the use of yer trying to play this here rig on a cove? You got the stiff and paid for it, and now all I axes is a chance to take it off yer hands."

"There is no body in this house," observed the doctor, rising, "and if there ever was one it has been disposed of, long ago."

"You have bin in a mighty hurry to get rid of it, and who got it, anyhow?" growled the fellow, rising and skulking to the door.

"I've a very bad memory, and I couldn't really tell you."

"It's rough on a poor cove, governor, but mebbe you will change your mind and tell somebody, sometime," and then the fellow departed. In the speech a threat seemed hidden.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DOCTOR SPEAKS.

DORAMUS was careful to see that the door was securely fastened after his disreputable-looking visitor had retreated; then he joined the savant in the study up-stairs, and to him related the particulars of the odd interview.

"It is strange, Daniel, and I must say I don't exactly understand what it means," the savant admitted.

"Neither do I. Of course the story about the

subject being the body of his brother I do not credit for a moment; and there isn't the least doubt in my mind that there is some deep motive at the bottom of the affair. Why should the fellow be so anxious to get hold of the remains?"

"From your description I should say that he was not the kind of man to take it very much to heart whether the remains had decent burial or not."

"Oh, no, not at all; a bad egg, Gayaway; as bad a one as I have ever encountered and I have had dealing, in a strictly professional way, of course, with some of the biggest rascals in the body-snatching business."

"There is only one reason why any one should wish to get hold of the remains," the savant observed.

"Well, if you can see any reason, you are wiser than I am."

"The fellows who sold you the body might be tormented by a suspicion that life was not extinct in it when they delivered the body to you. Perhaps something has happened to make them believe that the victim was not silenced as completely as they had hoped; a visit to you they thought would reveal the truth. If the man was dead and you had used him to experiment upon, an inspection of the remains would satisfy them that they had no cause for fear; but if, on the contrary, the man had been restored by you to life, of course you would naturally state the fact."

"Very true—very true, indeed; it is more than probable that you have hit upon the truth."

"But, cunning as the rascals think themselves they did not succeed in their little game this time," Philcard observed, with a great deal of satisfaction.

"Oh, no; I am no child to be handled by these scoundrels at their will," and the old physician shook his head knowingly.

The visit afforded the two friends food for conversation for some time, and it was quite late before they retired to rest. The last words of Doramus as he bade his friend good-night referred to the suspicious-looking and acting stranger.

The doctor slept in the front room over the parlor and the windows looked upon the street. He looked to the fastenings of the casements, as was his usual custom before retiring, for a little while, but he found them all fastened. He would not have been a difficult task for a nimble man to climb up the pillars and then enter the room through the windows if they were not fastened. These precautions taken the doctor retired to rest, and being, in spite of his age, of a robust and healthy nature he fell at once into a sound sleep.

The gas was burning dimly, so that there was light enough to distinguish objects in the room.

The old gentleman had slept soundly for some time, a peaceful, dreamless sleep, as was usual with him, when he was rudely and abruptly disturbed. Strong hands were laid upon him, and, with a startling presentiment that something was wrong, he awoke.

And things were not right. By his bedside stood three tall figures, all robed in white, and each and every one held a gleaming knife in his hand.

The doctor sat bolt upright in the bed, his eyes dilating with astonishment.

The masked robbers, against whom he had so often turned keys and shoved bars, had come at last!

And the way by which they had managed to enter the room, without disturbing the inmate, was plain. One of the windows leading upon the piazza was wide open. In the newspaper, that very morning, Doramus, in an account of a recent case of house-breaking, had read how easily the common style of sash-fastenings could be opened by inserting a thin-bladed knife between the two halves of the sash, and he said to himself, when he had read the article, that he would replace the old fastenings by new burglar-proof ones immediately, but he had neglected so to do, and the result was that the masked marauders found an easy entrance.

"Do not attempt to give an alarm, or we shall be compelled to use violence," warned one of the disguised men, pointing his knife in a threatening manner at the breast of the old man. "Keep quiet, and no harm will be done you," the man continued. "We want to use you well, but, if you compel us, we can use you very ill, indeed."

The doctor was amazed by the speech; the man was no common ruffian.

"Really, sir, I am not disposed to give you trouble, but I am afraid you will not profit much by your visit, for I do not think there are many portable articles in the house worth taking away," the doctor declared.

"We do not come after your valuables, sir," replied the mask. "We only want the body that was brought here the other night."

Doramus, completely astounded, only stared at the man continued:

"Do not attempt to deny that you received it, as you did to the agent whom we sent in quest of it this evening."

The doctor still was speechless.

"Come, the body; where is it? We want it, no matter what condition the remains are in."

As Doramus couldn't accede to this request, for the best of all reasons, he was at a loss to know how he could explain the matter without betraying the secret that was confided to his care.

"Why do you hesitate? Of what value is the body to you? Or haven't you got it?"

The question suggested a way to the doctor to get out of the difficulty.

"No, it is not now in my possession."

"Where is it?"

"I do not know."

"Is it not in the house?"

"It is not."

"Who took it away?"

"Sir, I hope that you will not press that question, for I have promised to keep the matter a secret."

"My dear doctor, I would not be the means of making such a man as yourself break his word for the world," the intruder replied, with extreme politeness, "but I think I can solve the mystery. The corpse was not a corpse; in fact, the man was not dead, and you restored him to life. Is this not the truth?"

The old gentleman, not a master of the art of deception, falsehood did not come natural to him, even if he had been disposed to equivocate about the matter.

"No need to speak, sir!" exclaimed the disguised man, abruptly, reading the truth in the face and hesitation of the doctor. "We are very much obliged to you for your information. And now, if you will give us your word not to create an alarm, we will depart."

Doramus readily promised, and, in a twinkling, the mysterious visitors took themselves off.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE STRANGER.

SEVEN days had elapsed since Doctor Diamond had departed from his house, and he had neither returned nor sent word to the anxious housekeeper in regard to his whereabouts, and Mrs. Conventon began to get anxious. She had never known the doctor to act in this way before, and now apprehended that some evil might have befallen him. In fact, so anxious and worried had she become that she had seriously thought of going to the superintendent of police and asking his advice upon the subject. She would tell the tale of another "missing man," "lost in New York," the great whirlpool, which often engulfs its victim, leaving no trace behind to tell the story of the final taking off.

The conduct of the little ragged boy, too, was a source of mystery to the housekeeper. He had called eight or ten times to see the doctor, and when questioned by her in regard to his business had, in the most obstinate manner declined to disclose it, putting her off with the declaration which she felt sure was not the exact truth, that his business "didn't amount to much anyhow;" the doctor had been kind to a poor, sick woman, and he wanted to thank him for it.

But, owing to the prolonged absence of the physician, an idea came into the little fellow's head that it was possible the mysterious departure of Miss Eldon and the absence of the medical man had some connection, and this thought determined him to stick to his notion of seeing the doctor until he succeeded in accomplishing his purpose.

On the evening of the seventh day Mrs. Conventon came to a determination in regard to the best course to pursue.

"I will wait until to-morrow morning," she said, "and if the doctor is not here by ten o'clock I will go and consult the police."

The lady sat in the parlor, for she had grown so anxious that she spent nearly all her time at one of the front windows looking out on the street, and hardly had she finished the sentence when there came a ring at the door-bell.

At once she jumped to her feet, for every time that any one came to the door she imagined that it was the doctor.

"No, it is not him," she murmured, as she proceeded to the door. "He has a key and would not ring."

She opened the door; the man that stood there was the same one who had visited the superintendent of police, that morning, and told the story of the existence of the secret band.

The moment the housekeeper looked upon the face of the stranger she became impressed with the idea that she had seen him before, and yet she could not recall the time or place.

"Mrs. Conventon?" asked the man.

The housekeeper almost started, for the voice was as familiar as the face.

"Yes, sir," she replied, extremely puzzled.

"I bring you a message from Doctor Diamond. He has been called away on unexpected business and may not be able to return for some time," and the man tendered a letter to the housekeeper, which she opened and read immediately.

The note was brief, and read as follows:

"MY DEAR MRS. CONVERTON:

"I shall be obliged to remain away from home for some time, to attend to important business, and I cannot now exactly say when I will be able to return. The bearer of this, a distant relative, Mr. Marvin Clarke, will represent me in my absence; he will occupy my room, attend to all my affairs, which he thoroughly understands, and you will take orders from him exactly as you would from myself."

And then, at the bottom, appeared the bold, plain signature of "Alcenor Diamond."

The housekeeper was well acquainted with the doctor's handwriting, and she knew at once that no other hand but his could have penned the letter.

The mystery of the voice, race and figure was at once explained. The stranger was a relative of the doctor, and there was a strong family likeness between the two, although when she had been puzzled by the man's likeness to some one whom she had seen before, she had never thought of her master.

"Oh, sir, you don't know what a weight you have taken off my mind!" she exclaimed, in honest thankfulness. "The doctor's absence has alarmed me dreadfully and I had made up my mind that if he did not return to-morrow I would go to the police-office and give the authorities warning about the affair."

"You have no cause to be alarmed; the doctor is perfectly safe and well."

The note had really taken a great load off the mind of the woman, for she was sincerely attached to the physician, who was one of the kindest of masters, and so for the stranger, as the representative of the doctor, she could not do enough.

After Mr. Clarke was comfortably seated in the reception-room, the housekeeper proceeded to relate about the visits of the ragged little boy.

"He must have had some object in coming so persistently," the gentleman suggested. "I will see him the next time he comes."

"There he is on the steps now!" exclaimed Mrs. Converton. She was by the window and happened to glance into the street, where she saw the boy slowly sauntering along, casting very wishful glances at the house.

"Call him in, please."

The housekeeper hastened to comply with the request.

"Here, little boy!" she cried.

Hoppergrass, for it was our little hero in rags, at once advanced eagerly.

"Has the doctor come?" he asked, as he mounted the steps. The prolonged absence of the physician had been a source of great wonder to him.

"Not yet, but here is a gentleman who has come directly from him who would like to see you."

The boy rather hesitated.

"What does he want with me?" he asked, suspiciously, half inclined to retreat.

"The doctor may have intrusted him with a message for you." The housekeeper did not really believe that this was so; it was only a harmless fiction on her part to induce the boy to enter the house.

"Mebbe he did," observed Hoppergrass, doubtfully.

"Will you come in, then?"

"Yes, ma'am, I s'pose so," and with considerable reluctance the gamin followed the housekeeper into the parlor.

"This is the boy who has been inquiring for the doctor," Mrs. Converton said, introducing him.

Mr. Clarke sat right in front of the fireplace, so that the full light of the gas shone upon his face, and Hoppergrass, who had come sheepishly into the room, twisting his ragged apology for a cap between his fingers, looked decidedly astonished when his eyes fell upon the face of the gentleman. Like the woman the impression at once came to him that he had seen the gentleman before, but for the life of him he couldn't tell whether it was so or not.

"Do not let me detain you, madam, if you have any household duties to take up your time."

The housekeeper, a woman of sense, immediately understood that Mr. Clarke wished to be alone with the boy.

"If you wish for me, sir, all you have to do is to touch the bell," she said, pointing to the call-bell upon the table; then she retired, closing the door carefully behind her.

"Sit down, my lad," Mr. Clark requested, pointing to a chair, upon the edge of which the boy immediately proceeded to perch. The lady who has just left us tells me that you have been here three or four times to see the doctor."

"Yes, sir, ten or a dozen times."

"The doctor is engaged upon important business and the chances are that you will not be able to see him for some time—a month or more perhaps. He has sent me here, to attend to all his business; I am a distant relative and well informed in regard to all his affairs, so if you will tell me your business, perhaps I may be able to attend to it as well as the doctor in person."

The explanation relieved the boy's mind just exactly as it had the housekeeper, and the look of suspicion which had dwelt upon his face ever since he entered the room gradually vanished.

He could not remember that he had ever met this man before, and yet his face and voice were familiar; he could not understand this mystery, and anything that he could not understand terrified him. But now it was all plain to him; the gentleman was a relative of the doctor and looked like him, and from the way in which the stranger spoke, Hoppergrass became inspired with confidence.

"I dunno, sir, as I've got much to say. Mebbe the doctor wouldn't have keered much to hear it," the boy remarked, slowly.

"Let me hear what it is and I will be able to tell you in regard to that."

"Well, sir, it was 'bout the gal whose mother died down in our court."

"Dura Eldon?"

"Yes, sir," and the boy opened his eyes at the promptness with which the stranger understood his meaning.

"I know; Mrs. Eldon died; the doctor was called in to attend to her, but it was too late."

"Yes, sir; well, next morning, sir, bright and early, almost before anybody was up, the young gal, sir, went away."

"Leaving her dead mother behind?"

"Oh no, sir; a hearse came and captured the old woman, and a carriage with a reg'lar blood in it—so one of the neighbors said—came for the gal; and she left ten dollars behind, sir, for me, and she said in the letter that I was to pay the doctor and keep the rest of the money for myself."

"Have you the letter?" asked Mr. Clarke, evidently not exactly understanding what to make of the boy's statement.

"Yes, sir; here it is," and the lad produced the letter from the capacious pocket of his tattered coat.

The gentleman read the missive carefully; while the keen-eyed boy, who was watching as a cat watches a mouse, fancied that a faint sigh escaped from the man's lips as he finished the brief note.

"Here's the money, sir," observed the boy, producing the bill from a secret hiding-place which he had cunningly contrived in the lining of his coat.

"Keep the money, my boy; the doctor does not require any fee. You have some safe place to put it?"

"Yes, sir, in the Five-cent Bank!" replied Hoppergrass, proudly.

"I am glad of that; the doctor has thought of you and has determined to aid you if it is within his power, and if you will call here to-morrow afternoon we will have a talk together and you shall tell me what I can do for you."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" the lad exclaimed, his heart full to overflowing at this unexpected piece of good fortune, and then, with rare good sense for one so little tutored in the ways of the world, he comprehended that the interview was over and withdrew.

After the departure of the gamin, the housekeeper returned and conducted Mr. Clarke to the doctor's sleeping-apartment, he having informed her it was the doctor's wish he should occupy that room until the master's return.

Diamond's sleeping-chamber was a large rear room on the second floor. It was bedroom and library combined, and the doctor's sanctum, where he kept his tools and professional rubbish, was a small room right in the rear of the other apartment.

After the housekeeper had left the room Mr. Clarke sat down by the side of the bed and gave himself up to intense thought for quite a time.

The first movement in the attack upon the White Band had been made, and by this time it was probable the detectives were on the scent, unless—and the supposition seemed absurd—the chief of police was in league with the midnight marauders, but the peculiar perfume that came from his handkerchief bothered the informer considerably.

At last he retired to rest, but it was some time before he fell asleep, and then his dreams were troubled and disturbed. The dreaded demon of darkness, the horrid nightmare, was rampant.

Suddenly, with a great start, the sleeper awoke, bathed in perspiration, and glared around him.

There was some foundation for the dreams, for terrible white-robed figures were clustered about the bed.

CHAPTER XX.

A DESPERATE DEED.

UPON retiring to rest the stranger had not extinguished the gaslight but had merely turned it down, but, dim as was the flame it gave ample light to distinguish all objects in the room.

His sudden awakening was a surprise to the disguised men and it interfered materially with their plans, for they had but just entered the room when, with a start, Clarke awoke and sat bolt upright upon the couch.

The intruders were all clustered at the foot of the bed and as the sleeper arose to a sitting position, with a common impulse they plucked from their breasts ugly knives that glistened ominously in the dim light; but not one of the band displayed a firearm; pistols were too noisy for these gentlemen who worked in the silence of the night.

Steadfastly for a moment the masked ruffians and the man, upon whose privacy they had intruded, looked upon each other, and it was a difficult thing to decide which was the most disconcerted.

"Speak a single word and you die upon the instant!" cried one of the disguised men, evidently the leader of the party, in a voice that the other recognized only too well, and in order to give due effect to the threat he brandished his knife in the air.

"Who are you and what do you want?"

"You know who we are well enough, and we know who you are, although you have disguised yourself in a very clever manner in order to take upon your hands the difficult task of hunting us down. You did succeed in reaching the chief of police without your disguise being penetrated, but the moment you made known to him what your errand was you stood revealed in your true colors, for only one man possesses the knowledge which you possess."

"And who may he be?" inquired Clarke, in the calmest manner possible.

"Yourself; Doctor Diamond!"

Clarke shook his head, but the disguised chief caught him up on the instant.

"Oh, it isn't of any use for you to attempt to deny it!" he exclaimed. "We recognize you in spite of your disguise, although it is a very clever one. We thought that we had given you your ticket to the other world when we lowered you down into the pit, shut up in the golden coffin, but you were evidently born under a lucky star for you escaped from the trap that no man ever escaped from before. And we know how it was done, too. That liquid which you swallowed, and which you pretended was a poison, was only a sleeping potion and it threw you into a trance that seemed like death itself; in fact, so much like death, that even the members of the White Band, who are up to a trick or two in that line, were deceived and all believed you were settled for this world. Then, in order to turn an honest penny, we sold your body to a doctor exactly as we told you we would, but in our smartness we overreached ourselves. If we had suffered you to remain in the well-hole no power on earth could have saved you, but by disposing of your body we put you in the hands of the man who possessed the knowledge necessary to restore you to life. There is where we made a mistake, but you, when brought back again to the world, committed a still greater error. Most men after having experienced our power would have been glad to cry quits—would have been content to skulk through the world in disguise and under an assumed name, but you—madman that you are!—you thought that you would brave the power of the White Band; you panted for vengeance and essayed to hunt us down; you made your spring and in the recoil we clutch you. Once again we hold you safely in our power."

"You will not believe me, then, if I endeavor to convince you that I am not the person for whom you take me?" the other asked.

"Oh, we know you, despite the skillful way in which you have managed to disguise yourself, and we are going to take you back again and put you in the golden coffin from whence you escaped; that glittering casket is hungry for its prey."

"You will not take me anywhere," responded the threatened man, in the coolest possible manner.

The members of the band stared at each other; the calm courage of the man astounded them.

"Do you prefer that we should murder you on the spot then?" the leader exclaimed, ferociously, and he made a movement as if to spring upon the other.

Both of the hands of the man, who had called himself Clarke, were concealed beneath the bed-clothes, but with the threatening gesture of the outlaw they came quickly up and the marauders started in alarm, for they thought, as they beheld the motion, that the intended victim was about to flash a pair of revolvers at them, but, on the contrary, all that he held in his hands were two small glass balls, hollow apparently, and filled with a dark liquid.

The chief of the band at once scented danger when he saw these, seemingly, harmless toys. He was sure that the man was Doctor Diamond, and already he had come to the conclusion that the doctor was likely to prove a pretty troublesome customer.

And the others were much more alarmed than the chief; the almost miraculous escape of their victim had produced a great effect upon their gross and brutal natures. It really seemed as if the man was more than mortal, else he could not have succeeded in the undertaking. Therefore when the little glass balls were pro-

duced their superstitious fears were at once excited.

"Do not advance a step or else your deaths be on your own heads!" Clarke exclaimed.

"What do you mean?" growled the White Band chief, uncertain how to act.

"In these little crystal globes death lies concealed. If I crush them within my hand, and they are as fragile as an egg-shell, it will be a miracle indeed if any one of you escapes with life from this room."

"But you compass your own death at the same time!" the chief outlaw exclaimed.

"Oh, no; you forget that I am learned in the dark secrets of chemistry; all my life have I devoted to wresting from the store-houses of nature the wonderful things that lie entombed therein. I can escape. I am Alcenor Diamond—I am the man whom you consigned to a living tomb, but it did not hold me; from the shadows of the grave I have escaped, and henceforth I have but one mission in life, and that is to hunt down and give to justice every member of your accursed band from the highest to the lowest; not one shall escape my just vengeance unless in the grave he seeks refuge from the hangman's rope. This is the oath which I have sworn, and I have supreme confidence that a just Heaven will enable me to accomplish my task."

Like the knell of doom the stern words fell upon the ears of the ruffians, and for the moment he seemed to their eyes the very personification of the spirit of vengeance.

The chief was the first to break the spell; even if death was confined within the narrow compass of the glass balls he was resolved not to be balked of his prey; with one slash of his keen knife would he end the career of the avenger.

But, before he could put his purpose into execution, Diamond, by the glitter in his eyes, guessed what he was about to do, and was as prompt to act as the other.

A single motion of his strong hands and the glass balls were shattered. Then, out on the air or the apartment floated the most terrible smell that the nostrils of man had ever known; it was the savage device of the almond-eyed sons of the East, the stink-pots of the Chinese, which cause suffocation and death unless the offender is speedily removed from the dreaded influence.

But the masked ruffians did not tarry to learn whether death lurked in the dense vapor which came rolling from the shattered balls or not, but the moment the doctor closed his hands, with loud cries of horror they fled, all except the chief, and he, in his mad rage pressing forward to assail Diamond with his knife, encountered the full force of the vapor which came in such a dense, cloud-like mass from the tiny crystal balls, that one could not help wondering how it was that the art of man could compress so great a substance within so small a place.

Well as was the purpose of the masked chief, desperate and determined as was his action, yet it was not in the power of nature to encounter the terrible agent of destruction which the doctor had let loose and rise superior to it.

He gagged and gasped as he sprung forward, the vapor entering his lungs; then he reeled like a drunken man; the knife fell from his nerveless hand; wildly he beat the air and then sunk down, senseless, in a heap on the floor.

CHAPTER XXI.

UNMASKED.

THE doctor had purposely overrated the power of the novel instrument of war which he had employed. In a close room, from whence no avenue of escape could be had, no doubt in a very short time it would have stifled any one unfortunate enough to be exposed to its powerful influence, but as the door of the doctor's apartment was wide open, so that the fumes could easily escape, beyond throwing the masked chief into a state of insensibility it harmed him not, and if his followers had only had sense enough to have remained outside, in the entry, until the fume of the vapor had spent itself on the air, then they could have returned with perfect safety and resumed their attack; but, as it was, the ruffians had only one thought, and that was to get out of the room and out of the house as soon as possible.

Careful preparation had been made in anticipation of bearing the prisoner away, and the scoundrels were not slow to avail themselves of the means which had been provided.

In the street, at the door of the house, a coach stood, the door next to the curbstone open, the driver on the box, reins in hand, all ready for a start.

The fellows stripped off their disguises as they ran through the house and rolled them up under their arms.

Into the street they hurried, and without ceremony sprung into the coach.

The driver understood that the plot had miscarried.

"Where's the captain?" he cried.

"Taken, by blazes!" the last ruffian replied, as he hurried into the coach.

"Start yer boots!" cried another, "or they will have us all in jail, fust thing you know!"

This was startling information, and the driver, now thoroughly alarmed, whipped up his horses at once, and away they all went, one thought only in their minds, and that was to get away from the dangerous spot as soon as possible. Little did these murderers care for the fate of their leader; so long as they saved their own skins they were content.

The doctor had easily avoided being overcome by the noxious vapor. The moment he smashed the crystal globes he closed his nostrils and his mouth with his hand, and leaping from the bed, had thrown himself face downward upon the floor.

When the vapor had spent its force he arose and proceeded to look after his captive.

The man lay on his side, almost suffocated by the fumes.

Silently, and in deep thought, for a few minutes, he looked down upon the prostrate man, attired in so strange a disguise.

The clew to the mystery which had for so long a time puzzled the detectives and the police authorities of New York, was at last in his hands.

This senseless man, as feeble now for either good or ill, as a new-born infant, was the dreaded leader of the terrible fraternity which had for so long a time made the chief city of the New World pay tribute to his ruthless cunning.

Diamond knelt by his side; his intention was to strip off the odd disguise so that he might learn who the outlaw chief really was, and, as he bent over the man from the person of the captive came the peculiar perfume which the doctor had noticed when the rascals were about to entomb him alive in the golden coffin; the same perfume, too, which he had detected upon the handkerchief of the superintendent of the police when he had called upon that important officer in regard to hunting down and destroying the secret band!

Diamond paused irresolutely; was it possible that when he removed the disguise he would behold the features of the officer, whose sworn duty it was to look after the safety of the great city and its people? It really seemed almost beyond belief.

"Such things have been, though," Diamond murmured, communing with himself, "and if it is not so—if it is not he, but another, is not this other in league with the superintendent? If he is not, how could the band have penetrated my disguise, or guessed that I had resolved to disclose their secrets and give them up to justice? There were no witnesses to the interview between the chief and myself; who, then, but the chief could have given the information to the band?"

He hesitated no longer, though; determined to solve the mystery if he could, he removed the white hood from the face of the senseless man, and eagerly looked down upon the features.

It was not the police official, as he had feared; the face of a stranger met his eyes—the face of a stranger, and yet a face that was not strange to him, though for the life of him he could not remember that he had ever seen it before.

The man was no boy, nor could he be called well on in years; he was a gentleman born, evidently, for he had a proud, imperious-looking face, with a sort of foreign look to it; no common man, but one likely to excite attention anywhere.

Diamond puzzled over the face for a few moments with great attention.

"Where have I seen this man?" he murmured, deep in thought. "His face is familiar to me, and yet I cannot recall the time nor place of our meeting. It seems away back in the long ago, so long that I have forgotten, and yet I thought I had such a memory that anything once imprinted upon it would never be obliterated."

Diamond rose to his feet, perplexed—more than he had ever been in his life, but a new direction was given to his thoughts by a faint moan coming from the man's lips, indicating that he was beginning to recover his senses.

Diamond understood that there was no time to spare if he would secure his man, and remembering that there was a stout cord-line in his drawer of odds and ends, he produced it and then proceeded to bind the motionless limbs.

A dozen turns of the line he took around the ankles of the outlaw chief; then cut the line and secured his wrists, taking particular care to tie the cord with knots that even a man with full freedom of his limbs would have found it difficult to untie.

The prisoner thus made secure, Diamond lifted him up in his arms and placed him upon the bed, so that he might be comparatively comfortable.

The shock of the removal seemed to act as a stimulant to the waking senses of the prisoner, and hardly was he comfortably placed upon the bed before he opened his eyes and looked with a dazed and wandering expression around him.

The first thing his gaze encountered was the cord that confined his wrists and the look of wonder which came over his face as he saw that he was bound showed he did not remember what had occurred.

Amazed and confused his eyes rested upon Diamond's face and then recollection served him. He remembered what had happened.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PARLEY.

FIERCE was the look which swept over the face of the captured ruffian as he gazed upon the man whose cunning wit had beaten open, brutal force.

Never before had the chief been so thoroughly vanquished.

Glaring at the doctor for a moment the outlaw exerted all his strength to free his wrists from the gripping cord.

But though he strained until the fine line cut into the flesh of his delicate wrists, white and soft as a woman's, it was only to ascertain that he was a helpless prisoner; his bonds were not to be severed by his own strength.

At last he ceased his efforts, while a short, hysterical laugh escaped from his lips.

"This is the best joke I think I have ever experienced!" he exclaimed. "I have heard of a man going for wool and getting shorn, but I cannot recall any such event ever happening to me before."

"There must be a first time for everything, you know."

"Very true; but it is mortifying though, all the same."

"Those that take the sword, by the sword must perish."

"Oh, yes; that's Gospel truth; but, I say, now that you have got me what are you going to do with me? Curse those craven hounds!" he cried, abruptly, breaking forth in rage again. "May the hot fires of the hereafter roast their miserable carcasses! If they had not taken to their heels and fled like a pack of cowardly rabbits—"

"They, too, would be prisoners as you are," interrupted Diamond. "It is not in the power of human nature to resist the effects of the weapon I used."

"You are an infernally dangerous man!" the captain of the White Band had to confess. "I knew that the very first time I laid eyes on you, and that was the reason why I took so much trouble to secure you."

"As events have proved, it would have been much better if you had believed the statement which I made to you and had suffered me to go my way in peace."

"Oh, yes, I see that now. I own up it was a mistake, but all men are liable to error, you know," the other replied, with an appearance of great frankness, although he could not suppress the cunning lurking in his eyes—an expression which did not escape the doctor's notice, and whose meaning he fancied, even before the other had opened his mouth, he understood.

"I did not believe you at the time," the captive continued. "There is a great deal of the bull-dog about me. When I get a notion into my head I am pretty apt to stick to it. I knew that you were a dangerous man; I was sure that you knew the secret of our white brotherhood, and putting the two beliefs together you can hardly blame me if I yielded to a third belief, which was that, if we did not put you out of the way, you would bring us to grief."

"A very probable supposition," observed the doctor, quietly, and closely scrutinizing the captive's face, for the more he saw of the man—the longer he heard him talk, the more he became convinced that he had met him before.

The prisoner detected this scrutiny, and it made him nervous, although this was not perceptible in his bearing.

"Most probable thing in the world, you see, but if I had known you then as well as I know you now I should not have made such a mistake."

"Do you mean that you would have believed me when I assured you I knew absolutely nothing whatever about your secret organization?"

"Exactly, and I should have thought twice before I provoked the anger of such a man as you are."

"Perhaps it would have been better for you," the doctor remarked, in a way that alarmed the other, for it seemed to bode danger.

"Decidedly, for you have got me in a tight place here," the prisoner observed, making a great effort to conceal his anxiety and to put a good face on the matter.

"Yes, almost as bad a one as you had me in when you placed me in the golden coffin and lowered me down into the well-hole." There was a baleful glitter now in the eyes of Diamond and an ominous ring in his voice.

"Well, I own up beat," the White Band chief said, after quite a long pause, "and it ought to be rather a feather in your cap, for there are not many men in this world who can boast of ever having got the best of me. But, I say, this is a deuced uncomfortable position that you have got me in here, trussed up like a turkey ready for roasting; how long are you going to keep me in this sort of fix?"

The doctor came a step nearer and fixed his eyes still more intently upon the face of the

bound and helpless man, much to the wonder of the desperado.

"Where have I ever met you before?" the doctor asked, abruptly.

"We never met to my knowledge until the beginning of this affair."

"Oh, yes, we have; I am sure of it, but it was a long—long time ago, perhaps when I was a child. How old a man are you?"

The captive winced at the question; evidently it annoyed him.

"Why do you ask such a question as that?"

"You are not as young a man as you appear to be."

"I am not an old man by any manner of means."

"You and I have met, and in the past you have deeply wronged me!" cried Diamond in a tone of conviction.

The look of amazement which appeared upon the face of the outlaw at this declaration was too real to be assumed.

"I cannot say when or where," continued the doctor, "nor the nature of the offense, yet a presentiment tells me that it is the truth."

"It is utter nonsense!" growled the other.

"I never saw you in my life until you were brought into our secret haunt the other night, and I have a good memory for faces, too, and seldom forget one that I have ever seen."

"And you never have seen me?"

"Never!"

And the doctor felt satisfied the man believed that he was speaking the truth.

"But you haven't answered my question yet—what are you going to do with me?" the desperado again demanded.

"What should I do with you?" and there was that in the calm voice which made the blood of the listener run cold with horror.

"Well, that is for you to decide, of course, but I own up vanquished; the game is yours, and if we were playing for any stake you would have the right to rake in the spoils."

"The stake you sought was my life—was it not?"

Cold and pitiless was the tone, and the helpless man realized that he could expect no mercy from the man whose life he had sought with such savage cruelty.

"I suppose it was," he answered, sullenly.

"And against that stake did you place your own life?"

For a moment the two men glared at each other, the eyes of the doctor, cold and calm, but as fixed as the eyes of the snake when it ensnares the bird, while angry, impotent rage gleamed in the orbs of the other, and he ground his teeth together.

"You don't answer;—is not the question a fair one?"

The vanquished chief dropped his eyes slowly until they rested upon the strong cords which fettered his wrists; then he spoke:

"I suppose I did," he replied. "When a man enters a house in the dead of night with a weapon in his hand, he certainly does it at the risk of his life."

"And I would be justified now in taking yours!" Diamond cried, quickly, and with such ferocious fervor that even the iron-nerved desperado was startled.

"No, you would not; I am a helpless prisoner in your hands, and to take my life would be the act of a coward."

"Bahl! After all, there would be more satisfaction in giving you up to the public hangman," Diamond suggested, consolingly.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MARVELOUS ACT.

THE doctor spoke as if he was debating the matter in his mind—whether it was better to kill the prisoner on the spot or to deliver him up to the authorities.

A thrill of rage went through the frame of the prisoner, but with a great effort he choked back the passion which was swelling in every vein.

"Are you going to give me up?"

"What else can I do with you? I know that by rights I ought to settle the matter with my own hand, just as if we were out on the far Western prairies beyond the reach of the law. It would be the easiest thing in the world to put you to death; a single well-directed blow would give you your passport to the other world."

"But you forget the law which would hold you accountable!" cried the threatened man, the cold perspiration beginning to start out upon his forehead.

"Did you not with your own lips say that, when a man enters a house in the dead of night with arms in his hands, he does so at the risk of his life?"

"Yes, and if you had struck me then the law would have held you justified, but the situation is changed now; I am a helpless prisoner in your hands, and it is your duty to give me up to the police, not to kill me in cold blood."

"And so, merciless wolf that you are, you fear to die!" cried Diamond, in a tone of contempt.

"Life is worth something, and I am not fool enough to fling it away!"

"If I choose to kill you, could I not say that it was done when you first came into the room? Who would dispute my statement? Your companions will not dare to, for by so doing they risk their own liberty, and, judging by the haste with which they ran away, they are not of the stuff of which heroes are made."

"Why kill me or give me up? I will make it worth your while to let me go free; I will pay you any sum of money you choose to name, in reason, of course—any sum that I can raise—if you will allow me to go."

"And then take the first opportunity afterward, that came in your way, to murder me in cold blood in reward for my clemency," the doctor responded, sarcastically.

"No, upon my soul! no! I will give my word that, as far as I and the White Band are concerned, the thing shall end right here. Give us your promise not to hunt us down, and we will swear never to molest you in any way whatsoever."

"It is impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"Because it conflicts with an oath that I have sworn and which I will not break."

"And what is that oath?"

"To hunt down and bring to justice every man of your accursed band; to unravel the mystery of the golden coffin, for I know that there is some dark mystery connected with that gorgeous receptacle for the dead."

An anxious look came over the face of the other as he listened.

"Why do you want to mix yourself up in our affairs at all?" he demanded. "Why can't you let us alone, if we are willing to cry quits? We will make it worth your while and we will not harbor any malice, either. As Heaven is my witness, if we had had any idea that you were the kind of man you are, we would never have troubled you in the first place."

"What mercy did you show me?" Diamond retorted, sternly. "I had never injured you or any member of your brotherhood in any way, but you condemned me to a most horrible death, and from which I escaped only by a miracle, which makes it plain that Heaven ordained I should escape in order that your secret band might be destroyed and the mystery of the golden coffin revealed."

"Can I not offer you sufficient inducements to turn you from this purpose?" the captive asked, despairingly.

"What would you have accepted from me when you lowered me into the well-hole?" Diamond cried. "And yet, there is no comparison between the two cases, for my death seemed sure, while I am only turning you over to the authorities, and between the Tombs prison and the scaffold the distance is great, particularly in the case of such a man as you are, well provided with money to buy skillful lawyers to block the wheels of justice. By delivering you into the hands of the police I do not assure your death; I am well aware of that, even if I succeed in proving that you attempted my life; but I do strip the mask from your face and hold you up to the world in your true character, and, in the mean time, your White Band will be deprived of your services as a leader and I fancy I will not have a very difficult task to hunt them down, as I have an idea that you are the brains of the gang; lacking your assistance, the rest will fall an easy prey."

"If you do not fall yourself by some desperate hand in the mean time!" the baffled man exclaimed, in a voice full of menace.

"Be that my risk," Diamond replied. "There is an old adage which says, threatened men live long, and after the scare I have given your bravos to-night I fancy not many in the band will be anxious to undertake the job of attempting to silence me. Now I will go for a hack and carry you at once to the police headquarters."

"Ten thousand dollars if you will let me go!" cried the desperate man, as the doctor opened the door.

"Ten millions would not buy you from me now," replied Diamond, implacable as death itself.

The door closed behind him and the prisoner was left alone to his reflections.

But, not long did he muse over the situation; he knew that he had not many minutes before him and that he must make good use of what few there were. At once, then, he wriggled from the bed to the floor, taking care to descend feet first. The cord around his ankles did not prevent him from standing up, and, although walking was impossible, yet it was easy enough for him to hop over to where the gas still was burning.

Deliberately, regardless of the pain, he thrust his wrists near enough to the flame to burn the stout fish-line which was wound so tightly around them.

Cord and flesh alike suffered, for it was impossible to burn the one without the other, but the man never winced, although the pain was intense for a few moments.

At last the line parted under the strain applied by the wrists.

"There, curse you! You are off at last!" he cried, as he dashed the bonds away, then he

whipped out a knife from his pocket and cut the lashings which confined his ankles.

At last he was once more in full possession of his limbs! Then, with no loss of time, he stripped off the white disguise, which the doctor had not taken the trouble to remove. Underneath he had on a plain suit of dark clothes, and from a secret pocket of the coat he produced a soft, dark slouch hat, and a false beard, black in color, like his hair. These two articles adjusted in their place, the change they made was wonderful. It is doubtful if even the sharp-eyed doctor would have recognized his foe, the dreaded captain of the White Band, so completely was he transmogrified by the simple disguise.

He made his way hurriedly to the street. No one opposed his passage, and, in the street, he turned downward toward the river, knowing that Diamond would take the other direction. Not a single soul did he encounter until he turned the corner of the next street; then he passed a policeman, who merely glanced at him as he walked by, for there was nothing suspicious in his appearance.

The doctor with the hack was back in ten minutes, but to his surprise, found that the bird had flown!

"It is life for life, now," he murmured. "Either the White Band kills me, or I must hunt them down, and in this desperate game I cannot afford to lose a single trick. I will see the superintendent as soon as possible. Perhaps he can identify the man."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ROGUES' GALLERY.

DIAMOND sat down and fell to meditating upon the situation. Matters had developed rapidly within the last few hours, and an entirely new face had been put upon the affair.

The doctor's game had been to keep his marvelous escape a secret from all the world, and especially from the members of the White Band, and this was the reason why he had appeared in a disguise. Alcenor Diamond was to be seen no more, and in his disguise as Clarke he thought he would be able to hunt the rascals down without their having any suspicion that a foe was on their track. But, that part of the scheme would have to be abandoned now. The brotherhood knew that he was alive, and, what was worse, the captain of the band understood that neither he nor his followers could hope for mercy at the hands of the man whom they had doomed to such a barbarous death. All the advantages of working in secret and in the dark, which he had counted upon, were gone; the band knew that he was alive and on their track, and the odds were great that they would be able to deal him a blow before he would get a chance at them, and the only way to foil them would be for him, since he had embarked in the detective business, to, Proteus-like, assume another disguise, so that, while they would be on the look-out for him as Clarke, under an entirely different appearance, he might succeed in eluding their vigilance.

The leak in the office of the superintendent of police puzzled him, though; from the words of the desperado leader it was plain that, from some one in the police department, the men of the White Band had learned that a foe was on their track. In such a desperate life and death struggle as this, it was not easy to carry on active operations, embarrassed by a doubt of one's allies. But the doctor had devoted his whole heart and soul to the task, and was resolved while life remained to pursue the war to the bitter end.

And so, in a very short time, he came to a conclusion in regard to the best course for him to take.

As speedily as possible Clarke must vanish, and a new disguise be assumed. And he saw, too, that it was not advisable to use the house for a headquarters any longer. No matter what disguise he wore, nor how careful or complete it was, he surely would be suspected if seen coming from the house by any member of the secret band, and the doctor did not doubt that the rascals would cause the house to be closely watched. There was opportunity though for him to act before the espionage would commence, for it would certainly take some time for the routed and demoralized rogues to recover from the severe shock which they had experienced.

He wrote a brief note to the housekeeper explaining that he had been called away by business and that he would not probably return for a week or so, and then, just as the first gray light of the morning was lining the eastern skies, he quitted the place.

Of course at such an hour very little could be done, but he did not dare to remain in the vicinity until an hour when business could be transacted, for then he felt sure his movements would be watched, and his idea was to have "Clarke" disappear as mysteriously as Diamond had done.

So he whiled the hours away as best he could until about eight o'clock, then sought one of the fashionable wig-making establishments on Broadway and encountering the proprietor in

person explained to him that, having been invited to a private masquerade, he was desirous of going in such a disguise that his most intimate friend would not know him, and yet the disguise to be apparently no disguise at all.

The wig-maker, who was a Frenchman, charmed with the idea, which he pronounced to be novel, immediately declared that he could furnish such a disguise that the most careful observer would not be able to detect that it was a disguise at all, and it should be so perfect that the wearer might be introduced to his own mother and he would pledge his professional reputation that the cheat would not be detected.

The disguise was an extremely simple one, merely a wig of long light hair, curling at the ends after the German student fashion, and a small beard of the same hue as the hair.

The "artist" fitted the articles on and then with a stick of pomatum colored Diamond's eyebrows to match the hue of the wig and beard.

The transformation was in truth a marvelous one and the doctor upon surveying himself in the glass was astonished at the complete change which the disguise made in his appearance.

The wig and beard imparted a sort of dreamy expression to his features, and he looked exactly like a German professor of thirty-five or forty, but not the slightest trace of his old self appeared.

"There, is it not magnificent?" the artist demanded.

Diamond admitted that it was, but expressed some doubt in regard to the deception not being detected.

"Try it! walk down Broadway and see if any one will pay you any particular attention. That is a severe test."

Diamond paid the bill, which was no trifle, for the wig and beard were really masterpieces of the hair-worker's art, and departed.

"If any one detects the disguise, without your revealing the secret, even your nearest and dearest friend, bring them back and I will return the money!" the mercurial Frenchman cried, as Diamond left the shop.

And to a pretty severe test indeed the doctor proceeded to put the disguise. He went straight to the police head-quarters on Mulberry street and asked to see the chief, and after the usual amount of red-tapism with which all public officials are hedged about, he was admitted to the presence of the superintendent.

That gentleman was engaged with one of the morning journals when the disguised man was ushered into the apartment, and having been informed that the visitor desired to see him on important business, cast a searching glance at him in order to see if it was any one whom he had ever met before. The doctor bore the look unflinchingly, and so perfect was the disguise that even the argus-eyed superintendent of police was deceived and took the visitor to be a stranger whom he had never seen.

A more satisfactory test could not have been devised.

And when Diamond perceived from the expression upon the face of the official that he was not recognized, a sudden idea came into his head. Since the chief looked upon him as a stranger why not keep up the delusion? The mysterious manner in which the nature of his business with the police official had been revealed to the White Band still perplexed him.

That the great head of the New York Police Department could be in league with the rascals, who so openly and unblushingly defied the law, seemed almost incredible, but, assuming that he was not, the only rational solution of the mystery was that to some of his subordinates the chief had related the particulars of the interview.

Diamond's new idea was to introduce himself as the friend of the first caller, and relate the particulars of what had occurred to him, which he proceeded to do, much to the astonishment of the superintendent, who listened with the utmost attention.

"Upon my word, sir, this sounds like a romance," the official averred.

"It is truth itself."

"I cannot understand how the leak occurred," the superintendent assured, extremely puzzled. "If I remember rightly there was no one present at the interview but your friend and myself."

"No one, but possibly you mentioned the matter to some one."

"Not to a single soul!" the chief declared, emphatically. "I intended to look into the affair myself and so I had no occasion to speak about the matter. No one could have told the fellow, excepting your friend or myself. Of course he did not, so the blame rests on my shoulders, and, by Jove, sir, I shall not rest satisfied until I probe the matter to the bottom. You say that you saw the face of the man?"

"Yes, sir." The doctor had told the story as though he had been called in to help secure the interloper.

"And do you think you could recognize the man if you saw his picture?"

"Beyond a doubt; for his is no common face."

"Let us take a look at the Rogue's Gallery then." And the chief conducted his visitor to

the apartment where this notorious collection of pictures was kept.

The Rogues' Gallery is a vastly overrated means of identifying rascals. The moment a rogue is caught in some wrong-doing, he is taken to a photographic gallery and his picture taken. Some submit to the operation as quietly as lambs, so that a really good likeness is obtained; others, on the contrary, resist with all their might, and are compelled to face the camera by main force, so they distort their faces in every conceivable manner and the result is that the picture is perfectly frightful.

The portraits used to be kept in a couple of albums, and on the back of each picture was the name of the party with a description of the particular line of crime favored by the original of the picture.

Therefore when one called at Police Headquarters with a complaint, straightway they were invited to inspect the Rogue's Gallery and pick out, if possible, the party to blame.

Naturally in nine cases out of ten the attempt was a most decided failure, for, out of a couple of hundred of ill-looking scoundrels—as nearly all of them were—and all bearing a great family likeness, to pick out one individual rogue was a good deal like the traditional search for a needle in a bundle of hay.

But lately a reform has been instituted in the Rogues' Gallery; the pictures are much larger and are contained in a couple of frames, so that if a citizen is robbed by any of the well-known rascals and succeeds in getting a good glimpse of the man it is not an impossible task to pick him out by his portrait.

Diamond did not succeed, though, for, as he declared to the chief, not a single picture in the gallery at all resembled the leader of the White Band.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

THE two returned again to the office; the superintendent was somewhat annoyed at the failure, and unbosomed himself to the doctor.

"It is very plain to me that such a man as you describe this fellow to be is no common criminal—no new hand at the business, but a wary old bird. It is possible, though, that he is, comparatively, a stranger. He may be one of the leading lights from across the water, and has been lucky enough so far to keep out of the hands of the police."

"The man does look like a foreigner."

"By Jove! I'll have him in time, smart as he is!" protested the chief, bringing his heavy hand down with force upon the desk before which he sat.

The jar tumbled over some photographs which were carelessly piled up on one corner of the desk, and one of them, falling face upward, was exposed to the doctor's gaze.

With a cry of amazement he seized the picture, while the official looked on in astonishment.

"Do you know this man?" Diamond exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, very well indeed."

"Who and what is he?"

"A mighty fine man, about as nice a one as I have ever met; just rolling in money, too, I should judge."

"A stranger?"

"Well, yes; he hasn't lived here long."

"This is the man!"

"What?" and the superintendent stared in astonishment. He could hardly believe that he had heard aright.

"This is the man, I tell you—the captain of the White Band!"

"Oh, no! impossible! The idea is absurd! I assure you, my dear sir, you are laboring under a mistake. This man is as high-toned a gentleman as can be found in the city."

"He is the captain of the White Band," Diamond repeated, in the most decided manner.

"And I am not surprised to learn that he occupies a position which assures him of being beyond the reach of suspicion. What do you really know of this man? Have you been long acquainted with him?"

"Well, no, I have not," the chief admitted. "But his social position is very high. I was introduced to him by one of the most prominent politicians in the city—one of our judges."

"Either a confederate or a dupe of this arch-plotter. I tell you, chief, he is no common man. He must be arrested at once, before he has an opportunity to place himself beyond the reach of detection. If the blow is dealt quickly we may be able to secure some evidence which will prove his guilt and lead at once to the destruction and conviction of the rest of the band."

"But hold on a bit, my good man! What grounds have I got to proceed upon? I confess I don't see my way clear in the matter, at all. If this idea should turn out to be an error on your part, there would be a deuce of a row. You can't haul up a gentleman of this kind as you can some poor devil of a workingman. This customer has got plenty of money and a host of influential friends. I should get myself into a peck of trouble if you couldn't prove your allegation."

"But I can prove it beyond the shadow of a doubt!" Diamond replied, earnestly. "I know that I cannot be mistaken about the matter. This man's face is no common one; you can see that for yourself," and he held up the picture. "It is not a face liable to be forgotten when once seen; nor is it of a kind to be easily confounded with another. I am not surprised at the station and standing of the man. It is exactly as I expected. I thought, when I hunted him down, I would find him intrenched within the walls of society, allied with the great ones of the city, the men who make and execute the laws. This man is a genius, no common rascal, and that is the reason why he and his band have so long defied the power of the law, and so cunningly has he contrived to screen himself from all suspicion that, but for the accident of this picture, it is doubtful if I could have succeeded in hunting him down, for now that he knows a foe is on his track, the chances are a hundred to one that he will take himself out of the way for a short time. I am willing, under oath, to swear that this man"—and he held up the picture—"is the captain of the White Band; what more do you want? Is not that sufficient to induce you to take a decided step?"

The superintendent was irresolute, and hesitated to reply. The visitor seemed positive enough, but he was a stranger, and perhaps not quite right in the upper story; the official had a serious doubt in his mind in regard to this, for the accusation seemed so very improbable that he could not bring himself to believe there was any truth in it.

"You see, my dear sir," he said, at last, "there is not the slightest particle of evidence to support this accusation—there isn't anything but your belief to go upon, and that rests, not upon the man himself, but upon his picture. We are all liable to be mistaken, you know; no man is infallible; you will admit that, of course, as a sensible man; now, supposing you are mistaken, and this man turns out to be perfectly innocent—another party altogether and not the game you want, just see what a terrible mess you will get me into. I should be the laughing-stock of the whole city, and in all probability have to stand a law-suit for damages in the bargain."

"Then you do not care to make the arrest on my evidence alone?"

"My dear sir, I do not dare to risk it!" the official responded, "but, give me the least testimony to support your assertion—the merest shred of corroborating evidence—and I will jump at the chance to put my clutches on the captain of the White Band as eagerly as a chicken after a grasshopper! Just try me and see."

Apparently the game was blocked, but Fortune was smiling that day on the bloodhound so relentlessly following the scent.

"Just a bit of evidence?" Diamond asked.

"Only a scrap is all I seek, and I'll nab the bird in a jiffy," and the chief drew out his handkerchief to wipe his forehead.

The peculiar perfume with which it was impregnated floated on the air; it came plainly to the nostrils of the doctor, and, remembrance serving him well, he seized instantly upon the chance.

"I have just a little bit of evidence to offer, which I think will support my declaration. The captain of the White Band uses a peculiar kind of scent, something entirely different from anything I ever smelt before, and, did I not know to the contrary, I should suspect that you were the chief of the band, for your handkerchief is scented with the same perfume."

The official laid back in his chair and stared at the doctor for a moment, an expression of the most profound astonishment upon his face.

The doctor surveyed the chief, and saw at once that the shot had struck home.

"Upon my word, this is a most remarkable thing!" the superintendent exclaimed, as soon as he could recover from his astonishment.

"Is it evidence?"

"Yes, slight enough, it is true, but, a thread has been known to hang a man. The party you speak of gave me the perfume."

"And that fact was not known to me!"

"No, nor to any one else, for there wasn't any one present when he gave it to me, and I never mentioned it to any one. It was a perfume which he said he brought with him from Mexico."

"Strange that so clever a scoundrel should be so careless in this one particular!"

"Not at all, and you are not well acquainted with criminal matters, or you would not say so. It isn't the detectives who catch criminals, but the stupid carelessness of the parties in question which leads to detection. Great rogues are always careless about some minor matter, and that is the way they are tripped up."

"You will issue the warrant, then?"

"Yes; it will be a fishing excursion, anyway. We will try the net, and perhaps we may be able to catch something in the cast."

"At once?"

"No, that would not be wise; we want the shadows of the night for such work. I begin to believe that you are right about this thing,

now, and the chances are that we will catch some big fish if we do the thing up brown."

"The man is already alarmed; he knows that there are spies upon his track, and will he not seek to evade the danger by instant flight?"

"No; he is not likely to fly. In the first place, he will not be apt to think he is known, even though his disguise was removed and his features revealed, and then, if he contemplates flight, he would be almost certain to wait until darkness set in, so that if police spies were in waiting for him in some disguise he might escape scrutiny. The chances are great that there will be a meeting of the head ones of the gang to deliberate over the situation at the house, to-night, and by surrounding the place with a sufficient force, we may be able to capture all the leading lights of the gang at one fell swoop."

There was, in all this, reason born of long experience, and although he was as anxious to spring upon his prey as a hungry bloodhound held back by the leash, yet Diamond knew that his impulse ought to yield to the cool judgment of the old officer.

"No doubt you are correct, sir," he remarked.

"You will see by the result that I am, and while I am just as anxious as you to get my hands on the rogue yet I know that a hasty movement would throw all the fat into the fire. I owe the fellow a grudge, the scoundrel! to dare to make my acquaintance and bob-nob with me like an old friend, just to pull the wool over my eyes! You come here at eight, to-night, and then we will see what we will see, and mind! not a word to a soul in regard to this affair."

Diamond promised secrecy and withdrew, well pleased at the result of the interview. The end seemed in sight at last.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MOUSE-TRAP.

PROMPT to the minute at eight that evening the doctor entered the police head-quarters.

He had found the task of killing time all day long somewhat difficult, burning as he was with impatience.

Twice, during the day, he had amused himself by promenading slowly through the street where his house was situated, and, in order to test his disguise, on the second occasion he had walked boldly up the steps and rung the door-bell; then, when the housekeeper appeared, he had inquired for Doctor Diamond.

Taking him for an utter stranger, the woman gave him all the information she possessed in regard to the doctor, which was not much.

His principal object, though, in venturing into that quarter Diamond fully accomplished, and that was to ascertain whether the house was watched or not. And he very soon discovered that it was, not only by one, but by two gangs of spies, and, what made the affair more mysterious, was that when the second gang made their appearance, which they happened to do just at the time the doctor was proceeding through the street, the first lot seemed to become alarmed and instantly retired, so it was plain to the doctor that the two parties were not acting in concert.

The first lot, from their peculiarly disreputable appearance, he judged to belong to the White Band, but the second set of spies, a couple of well-dressed, remarkably sharp-eyed men, appeared like detective officers. The spies of the White Band were alarmed by their appearance, for they suspected their presence in that locality meant mischief.

"Now, who the deuce are these fellows?" the doctor muttered, as he stood on the corner of the street, and attentively observed the proceedings.

The solution of the mystery soon came; a carriage drove past the house, turned the corner and halted in the next street. In the most innocent manner the two men sauntered up to it, the door opened, and the occupant of the carriage held a brief conversation with them.

From his position upon the corner Diamond got a good view of the occupant of the carriage. It was the mysterious woman who had held so strange an interview with him which, as the reader will doubtless remember, we detailed at the beginning of our tale.

"I remember, now," the doctor murmured, walking slowly up the street, "she gave me a certain time to comply with her demand, then threatened vengeance if I refused. Well, we will see; first to settle this White Band matter; then I will attend to the woman."

Arriving at police head-quarters in the evening, upon asking for the chief he was conducted into his presence, orders having been left to that effect.

The superintendent was alone, dressed as if he was booked for an evening party, instead of an expedition meditating the capture of a desperate and dangerous criminal.

"You are punctual, sir; are you all prepared to set out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Armed?"

"Yes, a pair of revolvers."

"That will do; the chances are that these gentlemen will show fight, and, if they do, unless we pounce upon them in overwhelming

force it will not be a picnic. I have made all needful preparations, and, having bestowed a good deal of thought upon the matter, I think I will succeed in bagging the game in a very complete manner. I put a watch on the house right after you left here, this morning—no common police-spy, for it wouldn't answer to do anything to alarm them, as the rascals would be sure to take flight; but, accident has been favoring us in this affair from the beginning. Right opposite is a boarding-house—a first-class place, you know, and I sent the newest spy on the force to secure a front room there. The spy is a woman, and as she sits sewing by the window it is only natural that she should look out; and so she is able to keep a watch upon the place across the way without exciting any suspicion. It would have been better, in one respect, if she had been an old hand, for then she would have been able to recognize some of the gang, if, as I suspect, it is made up of big fellows; but then, on the other hand, there was danger that some of them might recognize her. She has managed to send me three reports since she has been there, and from the description which she gives I think I know two or three of the parties. He keeps up a big household, lots of servants, male and female, the rascal! I noticed the style of the house when I was there once, and I thought, then, that he must be as rich as a prince to stand the expense of such an establishment, but I never dreamed that the fellow was a fraud, and that all his servants were on the 'cross'; and, now I think of it, I never did get a good look at any of his people. They were always careful to keep out of my way, although of course I never thought anything strange in regard to it. A man trained to hunt rascals can have the wool pulled over his eyes sometimes, you see. I will be even with him for it, this night. The house up there is like a mouse-trap; all can go in, but the pull will be when they want to come out. I have taken a great deal of pains with the affair, and as these fellows seemed to be pretty well informed about matters and things here at head-quarters I have tried to make sure that there shall be no leak this time to 'give away' the trick."

The chief, after the fashion of the times, could not resist dropping into slang once in a while.

"I have picked out ten of the best men on the force," he continued, "and have directed each and every one to be at a certain point at eight to-night, and have been careful not to lay any great stress upon the thing, but have spoken as if I had made up my mind to take a ramble with each particular officer. My plan is to surround the house completely so that not a single soul within it will be able to escape after I draw the line around the premises. The more I have reflected about the matter the more I feel inclined to believe that you are on the right track, and that to-night I shall make a great haul and put the bracelets on some of the biggest rascals in the country."

"I can answer for one, the chief of the band, and I presume his associates are equally able in their respective lines."

"But, how the leak occurred in the first place is what puzzles me," the chief observed. "Was there any one in the room when your interview with me took place? I cannot remember that there was."

"No one."

"And I am sure that I did not speak of it to a soul, and that is what bothers me, but I have taken particular care this time that there shall not be any leak."

As he finished the speech he glanced up at the clock on the wall.

"Time we were off!" he exclaimed.

The two descended into the street. A hack stood in front of the building.

"Get in! I will take you round and show you some of the sights of New York by gas-light," the superintendent said, so that the people lounging on the steps of the police head-quarters could hear.

Into the coach the two got. The driver had apparently received his instructions for he drove away without asking for any.

At the corner of the street a second coach, which was in waiting by the curbstone, fell in behind the other, but taking care to keep quite a distance in the rear.

At four different points the hack stopped and at each place the chief beckoned to a man lounging upon the sidewalk, a detective officer in plain clothes, who immediately got in or on the coach. At the fourth stopping-place the chief alighted and bade the officer take his place.

"I have a coach in the rear here which I shall occupy," he said. "The driver understands where to go and when he stops you get out."

The superintendent then got into the second coach, which at different points stopped to take in six more passengers, much to the astonishment of the detectives, who began now to understand from these precautions that some important move was on foot.

And the chief, who had been terribly annoyed at the fact that the first information

which he had received in regard to the secret band had in some unaccountable manner reached the rascals' ears, now chuckled with satisfaction, for he felt convinced that he had planned the raid with such care that the first intimation of danger the White Band received would be when the police descended upon them.

One person only had the superintendent at all trusted, and that was the Irish coachman who drove the coach, but he was the chief's own man—had been with him for years and was as honest as the day, and all that he knew, too, was that he was to stop at a certain street corner.

This corner was just half a block away from the house, and when the hacks stopped there and the men got out, the chief in a few words explained the situation.

"We are after big game to-night, gentlemen. This gentleman," and he indicated the doctor, "and myself will go on in the advance; you follow after, by twos and threes, so as not to excite notice. I will go to the front door and you surround the house front and rear, but keep out of sight. The moment the door is opened, Jim, and you, Bill, be prepared to go in after me if everything is all right, or to break our way in if they show any signs of being ugly. Get your revolvers ready, and don't hesitate to use them if the birds should attempt to break through the line, for it is no common game that we trap to-night. They are desperate men and they'll make a bold strike for liberty."

After this brief explanation the chief, accompanied by Diamond, led the way down the street, the rest following according to the directions of the master spirit.

The house was reached; it was in a rather dark spot in the street, and having a little yard front and rear, and being detached, too, on one side from the rest of the block, it was easily surrounded.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE GIRL AGAIN.

IN our anxiety to trace the footsteps of the doctor in his campaign against one of the most powerful bands of desperadoes that had ever infested the great metropolis, we have somewhat neglected to follow the strange fortunes of the orphan girl, Dura Eldon, but now we will take up the thread of her history.

She had much food for thought when she reflected over the particulars of her strange interview with the stranger who had stepped into her life-path in such an odd and unaccountable manner.

He had fallen in love with her at first sight, so he had said, and really, as the world goes, he was proving the truth of the statement in the most thorough manner, for what better evidence can a man give of his sincerity than when he backs his words by deeds? He was lavishing money upon her as freely as though it cost no more than water and could be as easily got. As he said, in his peculiarly soft and insinuating way, it was a case of love at first sight, and yet, despite all her efforts to do so, the girl could not warm to him at all.

She had accepted his money without a thought of the consequences, as a drowning sailor in a stormy sea will cling gladly to the first articles that the angry waves vouchsafe to bring within his reach.

In the agony that she had experienced in witnessing her mother's struggle with the grim King of Terrors, she had accepted the stranger's aid which had been so freely proffered without a single thought in regard to the price to pay for the service, for she had lived long enough to understand that very few things in this world are to be had without payment. But in her eagerness to save her mother she had forgotten all else. She had failed in her endeavor, but now she was called upon to pay for the service all the same.

At the first glance for a girl situated as Dura Eldon was, heart-free, unpledged to any lover, and, what was really wonderful in a girl as old as she, and as cultivated and beautiful, totally free from the trammels of any love-affair whatsoever, to be able to gain the heart and hand of such a man as Lescant seemed a piece of good fortune almost too great to be real.

True, she was very beautiful, very ladylike and very accomplished, but for a girl to be possessed of these gifts is not always a sign that she will make a good match. Beauty, grace and virtue do not always buy gold and station.

No doubt that most girls in Dura's position would have jumped at the chance to call such a man as the ex-Mexican duke, husband, but the more she reflected upon the position the more distasteful the idea of the union became to her, and yet, when she tried to reason with herself—to question why it was that she could not bring herself, if not to love, at least to respect and accept the protection of the man who was doing so much for her, she was not able to give any reason at all, except that the union was distasteful to her.

She struggled with the idea—she strove with all her power to conquer the feeling, but she could not; and ever and anon, too, the face of

the young doctor, whom she had seen but once, would rise up before her; she did not love him—how could she love the stranger whom she had seen but once? yet she felt that while he lived she could never bring herself to agree to become the wife of the man in whose house she dwelt and whose bread she ate.

The courtly Lescant on his part did not persecute her with his addresses. If he had been an elder brother he could not have been more attentive, or less like a lover. He seemed to strive to anticipate her every wish and to gratify it ere she could express it in words, but he did not speak of love or of marriage, and the girl was grateful to him that he did not.

In a very considerate way indeed he had said that he presumed after her recent affliction she would not feel inclined to mingle much in society, and although he would be delighted to have her introduced to the very large, yet select, circle of acquaintances which he possessed, under the circumstances, if she felt like keeping to the privacy of her own apartments, he should not attempt to dissuade her.

She was very grateful for this kind consideration, and, after all, what was the use of her making the acquaintance of these rich and cultured people? She was but an interloper in their sphere. Her protector would soon grow tired of the ungrateful girl, for whom he had done so much, and who could not bring herself to repay the debt in the manner that he wished, no matter how hard she tried.

She had accepted his money and so really had pledged herself to abide by his will, but she was crazy when she had so consented; now that she had recovered her sense she could not submit to the sacrifice although she dishonored her word by refusing.

Many were the bitter tears she shed, but better break the promise which she had given than swear to a lie at the altar.

For fully a week she did not stir out of the house, and the lack of exercise together with the mental trouble which was preying upon her mind began to make sad havoc with her personal appearance, and Lescant, whose keen eyes saw everything, understood that the girl was making herself ill, and unless he took measures to rouse her from the stupor into which she had fallen it might result seriously.

To this end he suggested a daily afternoon drive, and Dura assented with the passive indifference which now characterized her.

It was a trifling matter, and not even Lescant with all his cunning could foresee what an important result was to follow, from so slight a cause. If he had been gifted with the power to look into the future, not a single step outside of the house would Dura Eldon have gone while his will controlled her actions; but Lescant was only man, and man cannot foretell what is to come.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STARTLING DISCLOSURE.

EVERY afternoon about three o'clock the carriage was ordered—a very elegant affair drawn by two superb horses, a cross-matched team, resplendent in gold-mounted harness.

As it was in the pleasant springtime when all nature smiled, the carriage was transformed into an open barouche, so that the occupants could see and be seen.

Lescant's "turn-out" was about as handsome as one as the "road" boasted, which is not saying a little when the almost countless number of fine teams of which the metropolis boasts is considered, and the carriage and its occupants excited a great deal of attention; and no wonder, for a more beautiful girl than Dura had never graced the drive. And she was a new face, too—a fact which the regular drivers-out were not slow to discover, and there was much comment in regard to who and what she was.

Lescant was pretty well known, the "Franco-Mexican fellow," who owned a couple of gold mines somewhere in our sister republic, as he was generally termed by the young bloods who frequented the fashionable drive of New York.

Lescant, since his arrival in the city, had mingled a great deal in certain supposed-to-be fashionable circles, where about the only credential required of the applicant for admission is plenty of cash, and this the gentleman appeared to have, even to abundance; consequently the "distinguished foreigner" could boast of plenty of acquaintances; and as he was driven along the road well filled with fashionable vehicles he was kept busy in recognizing and returning the salutations of his acquaintances. But each and every one who bowed to him paid far more attention to the beautiful girl who sat by his side than to himself.

She appeared listless and weary, and gave but little heed to the gay scene of which she was a part. Lescant tried to rouse her from her abstraction by indicating to her the various noted people who drove by them, and with a great many of the celebrities of the city the gentleman was on bowing terms, if nothing more, although of each and every one he spoke in that easy, careless way that familiar friends generally use when speaking of each other.

At the end of Central Park there was a slight block in the road, caused by a fallen

horse, and as Lescant's carriage halted for a moment, another handsome equipage drew up along-side. In it were a portly, imposing-looking gentleman and a handsome woman of thirty-five or forty, magnificently dressed.

The new-comer took advantage of the slight halt to exchange a few commonplace remarks with Lescant, glancing the while with a great deal of curiosity at the girl; and the lady, too, examined Dura's face with more than common interest.

The horse ahead was got upon his legs and again the procession—for such in reality, the great string of carriages formed—moved on.

"That is one of the most influential men in the city," Lescant remarked to his companion as the other carriage drove away at a rapid rate. "A great politician; he is on the bench now, Judge McQuencher—Alex, the Big Judge, the boys call him. He is one of the rising men of the day. They talk of sending him to Congress when his term as judge expires. The lady with him is his wife, a magnificent-looking woman. I never saw her but once before—in a box at the opera, but I didn't get a very good look at her. And it is odd, too; I cannot recall that I ever met her before that time, yet, now that I get a good look at her face, it seems very familiar to me." The latter part of this speech was addressed more to himself than to the girl, and his head sunk slowly down upon his breast as with earnest thought he endeavored to remember where he had before encountered the beautiful Mrs. Judge McQuencher.

"It must have been in the long ago," he murmured, this time not addressing his conversation to his companion, "for she is no longer young. Let me see, fifteen to twenty years ago—that would be about the time;—where was I and was I involved in any trouble then? The woman's face seems to bring back recollections of evil, and yet for the life of me I cannot remember anything about the matter. And I prided myself on my memory, too! Am I, then, growing old, and are my mental faculties beginning to desert me and, at a time, too, when I need them all?"

This little incident produced a deep impression upon the man; the more so, because he was one of those peculiar natures that attach great weight to trifles.

The next day the carriage of the judge was again encountered, and this time the proceedings of the preceding day were repeated.

The wife of the judge examined with all her eyes the face of the young girl, while Lescant paid particular attention to her—so much so that he attracted the lady's notice, and, from the expression upon her face, it was clear that she was puzzled by the stare.

"If we have met it is clear that she does not remember anything about it; else she is a most consummate actress, and pretends not to remember," the gentleman muttered after the coach of the judge had passed. "Twenty years is not far enough back; I must go further still, say twenty-five or thirty, and that brings me to the hot, giddy and reckless days of my boyhood." Long and earnestly he pondered, but the willing slave that kept the keys to his memory served him not by producing from some secret corner the record of the past which he so earnestly sought.

Every afternoon for a week the carriages of the two passed each other on the road, and each meeting seemed to deepen the impression that the man and the woman had received.

Lescant was so sure he had encountered the lady before, and that the results of the meeting had not been pleasant, that he had determined to take the first opportunity to question the judge, in a quiet way, and find out all that he could in regard to the politician's wife.

The woman, on her part, felt a great desire to speak to the girl, and the more she saw of her, the more resolute she became to accomplish this.

In the achievement of the two purposes Fortune smiled first upon the lady. Her opportunity came quickly.

The daily airing had done the girl a world of good; the roses were beginning to appear in her pale cheeks; so that, on the last day of the week, when Lescant, as usual, urged her to partake of some refreshment at the hotel just beyond High Bridge, the Mecca of the pleasure-seekers, instead of refusing, as she had always done, she accepted.

They alighted, and the gentleman conducted her into the parlor while he ordered the repast; and a sumptuous one it was to be, too.

Then, happening to glance out of the window he saw the judge drive by, alone.

"The Big Judge is going to have a brush with Vanderbilt's team," said a bystander. "He's just beat him up the road, and now they are to trot a mile for a basket of wine, and they wind up here."

Here was an opportunity, perhaps, to get hold of the judge. He had ordered such an elaborate dinner that it would be fully half an hour before it could be got ready, so there was plenty of time, as the race would be over in ten minutes. Therefore Lescant returned and excused himself to Dura, then repaired to the piazza to await the judge's return.

But the Fates were not prepared to favor him just then, for, when the race was ended—the judge's team, by the way, was beaten badly by the fleet steeds of the railroad king—he did not get the slightest chance to draw the judge into a private conversation, for the horsemen present "chaffed" the politician most unmercifully on account of his defeat.

But, in the interval which had elapsed, if Lescant had not succeeded in improving the time, another had.

The hotel parlor was a double one—two rooms thrown into one by means of a large pair of sliding doors, and Lescant, when he conducted Dura into the first parlor and seated her in an arm-chair by one of the windows, where she could have a full view of the pleasant scene without, did not notice that, seated by the further window in the other room, half-screened by the curtains, was a female form. Possibly he would not have taken notice of her if he had, unless by chance recognizing her. But, if his eyes had not served him, the lady had recognized both him and his charge the moment they entered the apartment.

The woman was the wife of the Big Judge, and she was quick to improve the opportunity, knowing that she must act quickly or not at all. So she advanced immediately the moment Lescant left the room.

"You must excuse my freedom in speaking to you without an introduction," she said, "and I know, when you understand the motive which actuates me, you will only be too glad that I am bold enough to override the trammels of society. My name is Elvira McQuencher; I am the wife of Judge McQuencher, and my husband is very well acquainted with Mr. Lescant. What is your name?"

"Dura Eldon," replied the girl, somewhat astonished at the peculiar manner of the other, for it was evident she was laboring under great excitement.

"Mr. Lescant is not your husband, then?"

"No, madam."

"And I cannot believe it to be possible that one with a face so young and fair, so full of innocence and honesty can be this man's willing victim!"

"Madam, what do you mean?" cried the girl, astonished beyond measure at the words which had called the hot blood in a crimson flood up into her face.

"Exactly what I say; in such a case as this we must use plain language," the lady responded, firmly. "If you are not his victim he intends to make you so before he has done with you. When I saw you for the first time the other afternoon, your pure face so full of innocence attracted me, and I asked my husband who you were, and he answered me plainly as husbands do sometimes speak to their wives: 'Some pretty little fool whom Lescant has picked up for a plaything.' My heart revolted at the speech. 'May she not be his wife, or at any rate his betrothed?' I asked. 'Nonsense!' he replied. 'The fellow already has a wife in Mexico, some dusky old dame whom he married for her money years ago. He has told me so himself.' Then the thought flashed upon me that perhaps it was true, and I determined I would not let you sink into the pit of shame if my woman's hand could save you!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FRIEND INDEED.

ALL color now had fled from Dura's cheeks, and her face was as pale as the face of the dead; there was a wild look in her eyes as she gazed at the woman who had performed the friendly, yet merciless act of tearing away the veil which had obscured her vision.

"Oh, madam, do not, I beseech you, believe me to be the guilty wretch that circumstances would seem to indicate! I am as innocent of all wrong-doing as the helpless babe in its mother's arms!" Dura exclaimed, piteously.

"I believe it—firmly believe it, and if I did not, I should have hesitated in regard to interfering in the matter, for I know my husband will be terribly angry if he learns what I have done, for he and Lescant are on good terms, and he will say it was none of my business, and that I had best attend to my own affairs. But, I could not help speaking. I have a child of tender years and my mother's heart would not be still. Perhaps my child may be exposed to some such terrible peril and would I not thank the generous heart that would come forward to the rescue?"

"Hear my story, madam, and then judge me," Dura exclaimed. As briefly, then, as possible the girl related how it was she came to be in the company of Mr. Lescant, and the wife of the judge listened with the greatest attention.

When the tale was finished she spoke:

"I see, my dear child, you are perfectly innocent in the matter, and like a lamb you are being led to the slaughter. Your story bears the impress of truth in every word. This man does not mean to be honest with you in spite of all his fine words; he seeks your ruin, and has entrapped you into his house so that he may all the more surely accomplish his purpose. The French maid whom he has provided for you is

but a tool whom he has placed to watch you so that you will not be able to escape in case your suspicions are excited and you endeavor to get away. This Lescant is a bold, bad man, and being provided with plenty of money, which I am sure he never got in any honest way, he is enabled to do much mischief if he feels inclined, for, let people talk as they will, money is the most powerful agent in this world. I have often heard my husband speak of Lescant as being a dangerous man, utterly unscrupulous and regardless of what he did so long as he accomplished the purpose which he had in view; in fact, I have heard him say more than once that he should not be surprised if Lescant got himself hanged at last; yet, so strange are the ways of the world and of the men who inhabit it, that the judge and this man are supposed to be the best of friends."

"Oh, madam, you are so good to come to my assistance!" Dura exclaimed, grateful tears standing in her eyes.

"It is my duty, and I should be false to my sex if I did not interfere to save such an innocent, tender lamb as you are from the jaws of this ravening wolf."

"What shall I do? Advise me, for I am utterly helpless," she moaned.

"You must manage to escape in some way from this man's power."

"But where shall I go, and what shall I do? I am utterly friendless, you know; not a single soul in all this wide world to whom I can fly for assistance. Even the very clothes I wear are bought by the money of this man."

"No, my child, you are wrong; you are not utterly friendless," the other replied, impressively; "there is a Providence, just and kind, who rules the fates of us poor humans in this busy world, although carping men, in their wisdom, deride the belief and think that we are but the children of chance. This man, who so cruelly would make you his victim, is one of the kings of the world who thinks that cunning, force and accident alone rule the destinies of life. Now I, a woman, will teach him that his doctrine is not true. I am your friend; from me you shall have all the assistance you require, and my home is open to you whenever you may need its shelter!"

"Oh, madam, you are an angel indeed!" cried Dura, falling from the chair and kneeling at the feet of the beautiful matron whose garments she clasped. "How can I ever repay this kindness, or thank you for the service that you have rendered?"

"No thanks to me, child, but address your acknowledgments to the Just Being, whose all-seeing eye noteth even the sparrow's fall."

The girl bowed her face in her hands and sobbed piteously for a few moments, while the judge's wife looked down upon her in tender compassion.

"Dry your tears, my child," she said, after a moment's pause. "You must summon your best courage, for you will probably need all the strength of will you possess. You must leave this man's house as soon as possible, and come at once to me. Here is my card; I will pencil my residence upon it," which she immediately did. Then, opening her pocket-book, she took out a roll of bills and counted out fifty dollars which she placed in Dura's hand. "Here is money, for you may need it; money is the golden key which very few locks in this world are strong enough to resist."

"But, madam, to take this large sum from you and I a perfect stranger!" the girl exclaimed, in broken tones, touched to the heart by the generosity of the friend who had in such an unexpected manner come to her aid.

"You are in terrible peril, and I should be unworthy the name of woman if I hesitated to come to your assistance. Take the money, then, without hesitation—as freely as it is tendered. You may need it and I can readily spare the sum. It is my own money, not my husband's. I have property in my own right and am not compelled to go to him when I require funds. When you are once in my house you can laugh at the malice of this man, and if he should be mad enough to attempt to take you from there, my husband will very speedily send him away with 'a flea in his ear.'"

"Madam, Heaven surely is watching over my footsteps when it has sent such a friend as yourself to aid me."

"Doubt not that the Lord is good and great, and that all the powers of darkness shall not prevail against Him. But come; put away your money and dry your eyes. What course do you intend to pursue?"

"I do not know; what course would you advise?"

"A bold one is always the best. Say nothing until you reach home; then ask him to grant you an interview, and tell him frankly that you have concluded not to remain under his roof any longer. It is idle to disguise the fact, my child; this unblushing rascal is trying to make every one believe that you are his victim; I am sure of it from what my husband said, although he did not seem to want to talk about the matter. No doubt he will try to persuade you to stop, and may attempt to bluster and frighten you; but, keep perfectly calm, and in-

sist upon leaving, and if he is anxious to know where you intend going you are at liberty to mention my name. I presume my husband, the judge, will not like my interfering in the matter, as this man, I believe, possesses some political influence which is valuable about election time; but, for once, politics must give way to justice. At any rate, I have taken up your cause and I will fight for you to the best of my ability. Remember, I will be on the watch for you to-night. I do not think Lescant will dare use force to prevent you quitting the house, because such a course would bring him in contact with the law, and I fancy he is one of that class of men who are not anxious to figure in a police court. Be firm and you surely will succeed in escaping from this terrible trap into which you have been so cunningly led."

Then there was the sound of footsteps ascending the stairs without, and Mrs. McQuencher glided away.

It was Lescant, as she had suspected. He was somewhat out of humor at his failure to interview the judge; but, how much greater would have been his discomfiture if he only had known what had taken place in his absence.

He was so annoyed at not being able to get hold of the judge that he was not observant as usual, or else he surely would have detected upon the girl's face the traces of the emotional excitement through which she had just passed, but, busy with his own thoughts, he hardly glanced at her as he announced that the repast was ready.

They descended to the dining-room, where a most sumptuous lunch had been provided, flanked, too, by rare and costly wines.

Neither of the pair, though, were in a condition to enjoy the meal.

The girl was so much agitated by the awful disclosure which the judge's wife had made that she could hardly force herself to swallow the delicious food, and Lescant, an epicure by nature, was so occupied by gloomy thoughts that he did not relish the dainty dishes which had taxed all the powers of one of the best French cooks in the country to prepare.

The man was a fatalist—a firm believer in presentiments, and ever since he had caught sight of the face of the judge's wife he had been uneasy in his mind. He had no reason to expect that evil to him would come from her, but his inward monitor warned him that danger was lurking in the future, and that the blow would come from the hand of Mrs. Judge McQuencher. The idea seemed ridiculous, yet he could not shake it off.

CHAPTER XXX.

SPEAKING OUT.

SOME sage who had studied closely the lives of the famous great men who have played prominent parts in the world's drama has remarked that at certain times when affairs of great moment have been pending, these men of iron will, quick brains and wonderful activity have yielded to irresolution, when circumstances demanded the full exercise of all their powers, and this fatal want of action, like a paralysis, brought about their final overthrow.

And on this occasion, Lescant, usually the man of active brain and quick purpose, although fully convinced that evil was pending in the future, could not for the life of him think of any steps to take which might avert the evil. All that he could do was to brood over the affair and wonder how soon and from what direction the blow would come.

And the girl, too, busily engaged in planning how she had best carry out the scheme in her mind, was in no mood for conversation, therefore few words passed between the two on the homeward road.

Dura, having decided to wait until after dark before she quitted the house, it was not until supper had ended and she and the gentleman had sought the parlor that she framed her thoughts in words.

Cool by habit and iron-faced by long practice as he was, Lescant could not help betraying considerable annoyance when the girl made known to him that she had concluded it would be impossible for her to accept the proposition which he had made.

"My dear young lady, are you not acting rather hastily in this matter?" he demanded. "Are you sure that you have given the affair due consideration?"

"Oh, yes; I have weighed the matter well and I am satisfied I cannot accept the life which you offer me."

"You do not think that you will ever learn to love me?"

"I fear not."

"Remember, I am willing to take the risk of that," he remarked. "When, my dear girl, you have lived as many years as I have you will understand that in nine cases out of ten a marriage is not a love-match. Nine brides out of ten do not really love their husbands when they marry them. A few, perhaps, may think they do—silly, romantic girls, you know, but, in the majority of cases, a woman marries for a home and a social position. Marriage, naturally, is the end and aim of a woman's life; when the

man appears who has the requisite social position, and the woman feels that he is such a man as she can respect, she marries, trusting that love will come afterward, which, as a general rule, proves to be the case."

Carefully as this view was presented, the womanly instincts of the girl recoiled from it.

"It is impossible!" she cried. "I could never bring myself to consent to such a union. To stand before the altar and swear to such a lie would surely bring down the wrath of an outraged Heaven."

Despite his efforts to conceal his feelings beneath the mask of indifference, the contempt he felt for such school-girl ideas was plainly apparent in his face, but, he did not attempt to debate the question with her.

"You wish to abandon my protection, then?"

"Yes."

"Have you calculated the cost of such a proceeding?"

"I have."

"Going out all alone in the world to battle for your daily bread, exposed to a thousand perils and temptations?"

"Where in this world can we go and not be exposed to perils and temptations?"

A quick glint of fire shot from the steely orbs of the man; for the first time he began to have an idea why the girl was so obstinate about going away.

"Despite your willfulness in this matter, I still take a great interest in your welfare," he observed in his smoothest and softest way, and if the girl had known him well she would have understood that he was infinitely more dangerous than if he had displayed violent anger. "And, under the circumstances, I trust you will excuse a few questions. What do you propose to do? How can you thrust yourself out into the bustling, heartless world without money—without even a single friend? How can you live while you are looking about for an occupation?"

At first, Dura thought it would be best to leave her questioner in ignorance in regard to the friend who had so unexpectedly come to her; but deception was something foreign to her nature; and she remembered, too, that the judge's wife had given her permission to mention her name, so she replied to the question as frankly as possible.

"I am not utterly friendless, and I am offered a home until I can provide for myself."

Lescant was amazed; this was altogether unexpected.

"You are fortunate," he remarked; "may I ask who is the friend?"

"Mrs. Judge McQuencher."

The name startled him, and for a moment his face became hard and dark; ugly lines appeared about the mouth and eyes. The blow had come at last; his instincts had not deceived him.

Then, in reply to his question, Dura explained how she had chanced to become acquainted with the lady, while Lescant, mentally cursed the evil luck which had led to the meeting. His wits were in good working order now, and already he had thought of a way to parry this extremely effective blow.

"Do you wish to go now?" he asked.

"If you please," Dura replied, astonished that she was getting away so easily, for, from what Mrs. McQuencher had said, she had anticipated having a stormy time.

"I allow you to go without question—without raising any objection, because I know that you will return."

The girl was amazed at the confident air with which the words were uttered, but she did not reply; she was content to escape so easily.

"Am I at liberty to depart?" she asked, rising.

"Oh, yes, if you like; but you will return. I am older than you—have seen more of the world and am better calculated to look into the future. I am well acquainted with the judge and only slightly with Mrs. McQuencher. I knew her to be a brilliant, showy woman, but now I perceive she is also a meddling one as well. It does not matter, though; go if you like. When you meet the judge, possibly you will find that he is a safer guide than his wife."

The cool words, so calmly spoken, filled the mind of the girl with a certain almost undefinable dread. She was free—apparently—free to depart, and yet this seemingly indifferent man still held some secret power over her. Cobweb-like, now, was the bond, for she easily brushed it aside, yet she had a presentiment that, when he willed, it would become steel-like in its texture and effectually restrain her, despite her resistance.

The desire then to leave the house—to escape from the presence of this man—to test whether the presentiment was really truth or only the idle imagination of an overwrought brain—became a mania.

She hastened to put on her hat and cloak; Lescant saw her to the door and bade her good-by in the most friendly manner possible; he even offered to get out the carriage so that she might ride, but she declined.

"Well, as you please; but it is no trouble, and the horses will have to be harnessed, any-

way, to bring you home, for I shall send the carriage after you in an hour or so."

The cool assurance of the man intimidated her, and she could only stammer out a broken sentence of thanks, as she hurried away.

Lescant laughed as he watched the graceful form proceed down the street.

"Go! Beat your wings against the bars of your cage to your heart's content. When you find that you are safely entrapped, and that neither man nor devil can take you from me, you will be inclined to be more reasonable! What in the world made this woman interfere in the matter? Who is she? where have I met her? and is this all the evil that she has power to work me?"

It was a question that time alone could answer.

Dura went direct to the residence of the judge, which was only a few blocks away. Orders had been given to admit her, and she was immediately conducted to Mrs. McQuencher, who sat in her boudoir, which was a cosy front room on the second story.

The judge's wife received her with open arms, and was all impatience to learn how she had got along with the man who had so cunningly entrapped her.

Mrs. McQuencher was a clever, keen-witted woman, but she was greatly puzzled by the story that Dura told.

"You will return, eh?" she murmured.

"Yes; and he seemed so positive about it."

"My dear child, I must confess that I do not understand it at all. This man is a very fiend in cunning; I feel sure of it, from what I have heard my husband say, and I feel satisfied that if he had not some deep purpose in view—the successful accomplishment of which will return you to his power, he would never have let you go so easily."

"Of my own free will never will I return," Dura declared.

"And I do not see how he can compel you, but, from such a man there is always danger to be apprehended."

Then there came a knock at the door: the madam said "come in," and the judge himself entered.

CHAPTER XXXI. THE MINE EXPLODES.

THERE was a troubled look upon the judge's face as he entered the apartment, and his wife, well-used to his moods, understood that he was both greatly perplexed and annoyed: angry, too, and when the judge was angry he was no easy man to deal with. But, Mrs. Judge McQuencher was one woman picked out of ten thousand—and those who knew the couple well declared that, in an emergency, she was the better man of the two.

To the experienced eyes of his wife, his demeanor plainly indicated mischief; the frown upon his brow deepened as he beheld the girl, and then he turned and carefully closed the door behind him.

Confronting his wife he abruptly asked:

"Elvira, who is this lady?"

"Miss Eldon," the other replied, not evincing the least astonishment at the abruptness of the question.

"Miss Dura Eldon," Mrs. McQuencher continued, "and she is to be my guest for a short time—with your permission." The sentence was smoothly spoken, but, despite the words, the judge understood well enough that his better-half meant that the young lady was to stay whether he liked it or not.

Thus confronted, the husband was in a quandary, but, a certain pressure being upon him, he had no choice but to go on.

"Well, really, my dear, I wish you had consulted me about this matter," he remarked, playing in a nervous way with a folded legal-looking paper which he held in his hand.

"I did not think it would interest you at all," the lady answered, surprised, indeed, that the judge should trouble himself so about it.

"There are certain circumstances in regard to Miss Eldon which, I fear, will render it impossible for us to receive her as a guest."

Dura's face became pale; she guessed from whom came this blow, but the matron was fully prepared to give battle.

"I am well acquainted with all the facts appertaining to Miss Eldon," she replied, calmly, "and I am sure you are mistaken. There is no good reason why she should not remain with us. I have long been in need of a companion, and this young lady has kindly consented to stay with me."

"But, my dear Elvira, you do not understand, and this young lady, in her ignorance of business matters, probably imagines that she is a free agent and can do as she pleases, but it is not so."

Dura looked amazed, while the brow of the judge's wife became knitted with dark lines.

"And why is she not a free agent? She is all alone in the world, no living relative."

"I am aware of that, but her legal guardian objects."

"Her legal guardian?" Mrs. McQuencher exclaimed.

"My guardian! I have no guardian!" Dura hastened to declare.

"My dear young lady, I haven't the least doubt that you believe such to be the case, but it is not so," the judge remarked, in seeming kindness of manner. "The gentleman is below now, Mr. Lescant, and as he has legal rights in this affair he is not disposed to allow this young lady to have her own way."

"Alexander, why do you interfere in this matter?" the lady demanded, abruptly. "What is it to you? Why do you take sides with this man?"

"My dear, pray don't jump to hasty conclusions. I am not taking any side at all. I do not wish to be mixed up in the affair. It is you, my dear, who is taking sides, not I. I have no prejudice against this young lady, nor am I blinded by any friendship for Mr. Lescant, but as a public man I don't wish to be involved in any affair of a scandalous nature. This young lady has been under Mr. Lescant's protection, living in his house. For some reason, to me unknown—and I don't really wish to be any better informed, since it is none of my business—she has seen fit to leave the shelter of that gentleman's roof and come here—"

"At my invitation!" interposed the judge's wife, firmly.

"I am sorry for it, Elvira," he said, simply. "But, that has nothing to do with what I am about to say. She has come here and Mr. Lescant has come after her. Naturally I questioned him on the subject. I said: 'This lady, you say, is here with my wife; who is she? and have you any right to control her actions?'"

"He has not—none in the world!" the girl exclaimed.

"Against your mere assertion, miss, he puts legal proof." Then the judge unfolded the paper which he held in his hand. "This document, executed by your mother on the day before her decease, so the gentleman informs me, makes Mr. Lescant your legal guardian until you come of age, which event, I believe, will not occur until some ten months hence."

The judge handed the paper to the girl, who received it in utter amazement; this was an unexpected blow, and even the strong-minded matron of the house was dismayed by it.

The document was correctly executed, and at the bottom was the faint, irresolute-looking signature of Dura's mother. There was no possibility of a mistake; the girl could have picked the signature out from amid a thousand, but, despite this fact, Dura felt sure that her mother's hand had never traced the letters.

"This is some horrid trick!" she cried, indignantly. "The day before my mother died she was not strong enough to have been able to write her name, and this man did not visit the house at all. I remember distinctly he came two days before, and on the day of her death, but not on the previous day."

"His statement is that he visited her in your absence and that she wished the matter to be kept concealed from you."

"It is an infamous falsehood!" Dura protested; "my angel mother would never have acted so."

"People do strange things, particularly at the near approach of death. But, as a judge, my dear young lady, it is my duty to inform you that this paper is legally correct in every particular, and that Mr. Lescant has the right to compel you to obey him until you are of age. If you refuse to go he can appeal to the nearest court and the law will force you to go."

"This is outrageous!" the lady declared.

"It is the law, my dear Elvira; there is no getting around it in any way. The young lady had best go quietly and avoid the public scandal of an appearance in a police-court."

"But, surely, this man will not proceed to such an extremity?"

"My dear, he certainly will, for he is very much annoyed and determined about the matter."

"Oh, I had best go!" Dura cried, wildly. "It is my fate, seemingly, but let this man beware! I am a child no longer but a desperate woman, and he may rue the day when he planned this cunning scheme!"

Mrs. McQuencher was in a quandary; she knew enough of the law to be aware that the judge had spoken correctly, and how to aid the girl was a puzzle.

Dura quickly dressed herself for the street, and then, accompanied by the judge and his wife, descended to the avenue.

Lescant was in the carriage at the door. The coachman hastened to assist her to enter the vehicle.

Mrs. McQuencher kissed her good-by, and took advantage of the occasion to say, loud enough for the occupant of the carriage to hear, as she intended he should:

"Remember, myself and purse are at your command whenever you need them!"

Dura entered the carriage and away it went. Again the lamb was in the power of the wolf but now long! Oh, Lord! how long!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THROWING OFF THE MASK.

NOT a word passed between the two in the carriage during the short homeward drive.

When they arrived at the house, Lescant, in

the most gallant manner, offered to assist Dura to alight, but she did not take the slightest notice of the proffered hand, while he followed her into the house, a threatening look upon his dark face.

She went up-stairs to her room and still Lescant followed. After she entered the apartment she turned to close the door and then for the first time discovered that he was behind her.

He anticipated her action and closed the door himself.

"You will pardon my intrusion," he said, in the smooth, oily way which had now become so hateful to her, "but I thought it was better that we should have an understanding immediately."

"As you please," responded Dura, removing her hat and cloak, seating herself in a chair and facing him with a stolid countenance.

He cast a quick, searching glance into her face, and saw plainly there the reflex of the stubborn spirit which dominated, but he had made up his mind to conquer.

He imitated the girl's action and helped himself to a chair.

"I allowed you to leave the house this evening without throwing any obstacles in your way because I wished to show you how utterly foolish was this mad rebellion against my power. The judge's wife, who, I shrewdly suspect, put you up to this trick, is one of those well-meaning, shallow-brained women, invariably at the bottom of all mischief in this world. But, now that I have taken you from her protecting wing I presume you are sensible enough to understand that your future rests in my hands. It is my intention to make you my wife, and I assure you I shall not allow any foolish, girlish fancy on your part to interfere with that purpose."

"You are wasting your time, sir; I will not marry you, nor can you compel me so to do. At last, thank Heaven! my eyes are opened in regard to your true character. You are a careful, cunning, scheming villain; I am a helpless woman, all alone in this vast world, with only a single friend upon whom I can rely, and she is a woman like myself; and yet, terrible as are the odds in your favor, I tell you that in the end you will not triumph. A just Providence will not permit such villainy as yours to go unpunished; the day of reckoning will come for you, and when it does it will be a terrible one."

"My dear child, that sort of thing is all very well on the stage, or in the pages of a novel, but in real life it is positively absurd. The idea of calling down the vengeance of Heaven upon my head, simply because I want to make you comfortable and happy in spite of yourself! You are a foolish child who don't know what is good for you. Age and experience have given me wisdom, and as I am your legal guardian I shall exercise the right which the law gives me to control your actions. I know that, in time, you will get over these notions, and therefore I mean to make you my wife, whether you like it or not."

This cool declaration infuriated the girl and she sprung to her feet.

"Never!" she cried, "never! It is impossible! The law does not give you any such power. I know very little of such matters, but enough to be convinced that such a thing cannot be. What law will compel me to answer yes, when I deliberately and resolutely set my heart upon saying no? Besides, how can you marry me when you are already married?"

This was a surprise—a startling one—but Lescant's face did not betray how much he was affected; the only signs of emotion were an ugly, ominous glitter which shone from his eyes, and a peculiar contraction of the muscles of the mouth.

"Married!" he exclaimed, after a moment's pause, with a sort of a contemptuous laugh, "and who has been amusing themselves by relating that fable to you? The wife of my esteemed friend, Judge McQuencher, of course, for she is the only one whom you have had an opportunity of seeing, and being a woman naturally given to gossip and mischief-making she retails as truth all the scandalous lies that float around the world. My dear child, don't you know that if I am a married man, I should render myself liable to the State prison by wedding you, and I trust that whatever else you may think me you at least will give me credit for not being a thorough idiot."

"I believe you to be villain enough to do and dare anything!" the girl cried, with a sudden outburst of passion. "The signature of my mother to that paper of guardianship is a base forgery. You were not at the house on the day stated in that document, you never held any conversation with my mother nor came to any agreement with her in regard to myself. It was with me you dealt, and I agreed to sell myself to you in order that I might procure money to prolong my mother's life."

"But, now you repudiate that agreement; you are not willing to stand to your word!"

"Why should I keep faith and link my young life to a man whom now, stripped of all disguise, I know to be a base and heartless villain?"

"You mean that you believe the lies which you have heard about me rather than my assertions?"

"The forged signature to that paper! Explain that away if you can!"

Lescant was fairly caught, and he well knew it was but a waste of words to attempt to persuade the girl to look upon him with a favorable eye, and his anger, too, which had been gradually rising could now be no longer restrained.

"Your voice is all for war, then!" he exclaimed, angrily, rising as he spoke. "Be it so. I will no longer attempt to argue with you, or try to persuade you out of your foolish notions, as I would with a sensible woman; but I will treat you like a spoiled, willful child and use force instead of persuasion."

The breath came quick and hard from Dura's lips; the mask was off, with a vengeance, and the man appeared in his true colors.

"You will not dare?" she cried.

"Will I not?" he retorted; "wait and see! Hitherto I have tried to show you how pleasant and amiable I could be, but now I shall take the opposite course, and you shall see that there are other wills as stubborn as your own. From this time forth you are virtually a prisoner in this house; not a foot outside the door shall you stir until I have made you mine!"

"That will never be!" Dura declared, undauntedly. "I will die first!"

"No, not before the ceremony is over; you may die afterward if you like. But such talk is all nonsense."

"Where will you find a minister to wed me to you against my protest? for protest I will to my latest breath."

"The man will be found, and if, by any chance, such a thing should happen that one could not be procured, why, we will have to do without. I will wed you after the fashion of some of the savage African tribes where the anxious lover lies in wait for his sweetheart, stuns her with a blow on the head with a heavy club, drags her to his cabin, and when she recovers she finds she is a wife."

Dura recoiled in horror. It did not seem possible to her pure mind that such a fiendish scheme could for a single moment find a lodging within the breast of man, but the tone in which he spoke, and the expression upon his face, convinced her that she was in the power of one who would not shrink from committing any outrage, no matter how great.

"I have spoken plainly," he continued, "for it is better that you should know what you have to expect if you attempt to brave me. I have done with child's play, and henceforth every hour that you live you shall feel that you are helpless in my power."

"God will save me!" asseverated the girl, almost frenzied by the fearful peril.

Then through the house rung the sound of a pistol-shot.

Lescant rushed to the door, opened it and put his head out. There was a noise of scuffling in the entry below, and then a bell sounded.

CHAPTER XXXIII. IN THE TRAP.

THE bell rung out loud and clear, and hardly had the sounds swelled on the air when heavy footsteps were heard ascending the stairs in haste.

Lescant shut the door quickly and drew the heavy bolt upon the outside—a bolt so strong that it was evident it was not for mere ornament alone.

Dura in astonishment watched the movements of the man, who was evidently laboring under great excitement, for his face was deadly pale and his eyes were snapping with nervousness.

Lescant ran to one of the two windows which were in the rear wall of the apartment, and threw the sash up, but, as he thrust his head out, having apparently made up his mind to jump from the casement, a groan came from his lips. By the help of the moonlight, which partially illuminated the yard, he discovered that it was full of dark figures and that a struggle had just ended.

"Trapped, trapped, trapped!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper, as he closed the window, and faced about, irresolutely, trembling in every limb.

Then there came a loud rap at the door.

"Open it, open it," Lescant cried, in a hoarse whisper, "but take time about it; do not be in a hurry, and for Heaven's sake do not say a word about my being in the room. You are free to depart and I will never trouble you again, I swear!"

Amazed and confused by these strange proceedings, which were entirely beyond her comprehension, Dura essayed to carry out the instructions which she had received, but in his haste to bolt the door Lescant had shoved the bolt in so far that it was no small trouble for her tender fingers to release it. But the task was accomplished at last, and, as she opened the door, three stalwart men with cocked revolvers in their hands met her eyes.

The foremost man recognized her at once, while she did not remember ever meeting

him before, although his voice sounded familiar.

"Miss Eldon, is it possible you are here?" the stranger cried, in amazement. "What are you doing in this den of thieves, and where is the chief man of the band?"

The girl made way for them, and the three entered the room.

It was empty. Lescant had disappeared.

"By Jove! he has given us the slip!" cried another one of the men, a big, burly fellow with an unmistakable air of command about him.

"Where is the man—was he not here with you?" asked the one who had spoken first, and then perceiving that the girl had not recognized him, he remembered that he was disguised, and proceeded to introduce himself. "I perceive that you do not know me, Miss Eldon, changed as I am. Do you not remember Doctor Diamond? I am he."

"Oh, yes; I know you now, and I thought I recognized the voice when you first spoke. Who is it that you are in search of—Mr. Lescant?"

"Yes, I believe that is the name that he is known under, in this neighborhood. One of the gang down-stairs, hoping to curry favor with us, betrayed his chief and said that he was in this room."

"And so he was when you knocked, and he himself told me to open the door."

"And took advantage of your back being turned to take himself off!" ejaculated the burly fellow, who was the superintendent of police in person.

"There must be a secret door here, somewhere!" cried Diamond, who had the bloodhound's keenness on the scent.

"He can't get away; the house is entirely surrounded," remarked the other police officer.

Eager in the search, the three immediately proceeded to examine the walls, sounding them with the butts of their pistols, but no sign of a secret door could they discover.

Determined not to be foiled, the doctor turned his attention to the floor; a rug in one corner of the apartment which, to his keen eyes, seemed to have been recently displaced from its regular position, attracted his gaze. He advanced to it and kicked it away; underneath the carpet was pieced, and the rug was, apparently, to conceal this fact. But, Diamond guessed the truth instantly. Under the carpet was a trap-door.

"Lend a hand here!" the doctor cried. The others at once came to his assistance; but, though all believed a trap-door was concealed by the carpet, yet they were not able to budge it in the least.

"I'll go down-stairs and see if I can't hunt up an ax, and at the same time give the boys warning to be on the look out for this fellow. There is either a hiding-place or a pair of stairs under this trap; if it is stairs they lead to the ground floor of course, and when I am down there I will look for the door. The fellow don't stand any chance to get away, for the entry is guarded, and there's a line around the house on the outside, too."

Then the superintendent hurried away, while the other officer amused himself by thrusting the blade of a bowie-knife through the cracks in the carpet. Diamond and Miss Eldon were left free for a few minutes' conversation.

Briefly as possible Dura explained to the doctor all that had occurred since their last meeting by the bedside of the dead woman, and Diamond listened with the greatest attention.

Acquainted as he was with the secret of the man whose protection she had accepted, he found no difficulty in accounting for the mysterious conduct of the apparently generous benefactor.

"He is the leader of a desperate band of villains who for a long time have laughed to scorn the power of the law," Diamond explained. "The band is in all probability the most dangerous one that has ever had an existence in this city, for it is no common association of low and vulgar ruffians, but includes within its ranks many, so-called, respectable men, merchants, bankers, lawyers, judges on the bench maybe; but, now that we have seized the principal members in their head-quarters, it will not be a very hard task to ferret out the secret allies who have for so long rendered the rascals valuable aid in assisting them to escape from the consequences of their crime. You were all alone in the world, with no friends or relatives, and this master-thief thought that if he could bend you to his purpose you would be a most valuable ally, and that is the reason why he took so much trouble to secure you. I must look after this Judge McQuencher; the interest he manifests in this fellow is something out of the common run. It would be odd if, through your adventures with the rascal, I should manage to get hold of one of the big birds, who are so hard to trace and track."

By this time the superintendent was back, and in his hand he bore an ax.

"No trace of a secret passage below, anywhere," he said, "but the fellow must be in the building, unless this passage leads into the next

house, and if it does he will give us the slip in spite of all our precautions."

"It is a trap-door!" remarked the officer who had been experimenting with the knife on the cracks, "and there is a bolt here, I think, which holds the door on the under side."

"I will smash it right in with the ax."

And the chief was as good as his word. With a couple of powerful blows he shattered the frail boards, which had never been framed to resist such an assault. Beneath the opening was a narrow stairway leading down into utter darkness. Its passage was so small that the burly chief looked at it a little doubtfully, uncertain whether he would be able to pass through it or not.

The detective drew a dark-lantern from his pocket, lit it, and flashed the light down into the darkness.

"It leads to the cellar, evidently," the doctor observed.

"It's ten to one that we will trap our bird, after all!" the superintendent exclaimed exultingly. "It would be a rough joke on us to have the king-pin slip through our hands, after all our trouble. You go ahead, Jim, and keep your popper ready. He may show fight when he finds that he is cornered."

Down into the darkness then went the three, Diamond bringing up the rear.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PERSEVERANCE REWARDED.

THE cellar in which the three man-hunters found themselves, after descending the stairs, did not differ materially from any ordinary cellar, excepting that it was carefully finished. The floor was cemented, and the walls and ceiling plastered as carefully as though it had been a dwelling-room.

Standing in the center of the apartment the officer flashed the light of the bull's eye lantern around.

In the front wall was a coal-shoot, and the first thought of the police chief was that the prisoner might have managed to escape through the hole covered by the iron plate to the street without, but a second thought told him that, even if the fugitive had succeeded in so doing, he would surely have fallen into the hands of the officers stationed upon the watch without the house.

But the man of whom they were in chase was nowhere in sight, and there was, at the first glance, apparently no place where he could hide.

By the side wall a staircase led up to the next floor, but it was not an inclosed one, and a door at the top opened into the hall. The fugitive could not have succeeded in escaping that way, for the entry above was full of officers.

Where, then, was the man? The detectives gazed about them, puzzled. Within the cellar, besides the bare walls, were only two things upon which they could look—a large ice-chest, one of the patent refrigerators so popular and so expensive, and a pile of lumber composed of quite wide boards, and about a foot high. The boards were piled up in regular layers, close to the wall, without space enough between to have afforded shelter to a rat.

But the refrigerator—it was a monster, large enough for a good-sized hotel, and the thought that there was plenty of room inside of it to afford shelter to a good-sized man occurred to all of the pursuers.

The chief nodded significantly toward the ice-box; the detective marched over and attempted to open it, but it was locked.

"Well, I never heard of one of these things being so constructed that it could be locked from the inside," the superintendent remarked; he had followed close on the heels of the other, as had also the doctor; "but this machine may have been so arranged on purpose."

"I have a few 'skeletons' in my pocket," the officer announced, and thereupon he immediately produced a bunch of skeleton-keys, as the peculiar "pick-lock" tools of the burglar are called.

The officer squinted at the lock by the aid of the lantern, then picked out a key which he thought would be likely to fit, and the very first attempt was a success.

The key turned; the bolt leaped back and the door swung open.

Eagerly they all pressed forward, anxious to seize their prisoner, but the chest was empty!

In astonishment the three looked in each other's faces for a moment. The puzzle was a profound one.

"Hang it!" cried the superintendent, annoyed; "the fellow must be around here somewhere."

"There may be a hiding-place in the walls," Diamond suggested.

"Very true," the chief assented, "but if there is we can easily discover it by sounding."

Then with the butts of their pistols the three men tapped the walls of the cellar in the most thorough manner, nor did the cemented floor escape their research, but all in vain; no secret hiding-places could they find.

"Well, sir, this beats a chicken dispute!" the superintendent exclaimed, in disgust, as he halted by the pile of boards and surveyed them

with a critical eye. "The man came down those and he is in this cellar somewhere, for there isn't a hole here, as far as I can see, big enough for a mouse to get out. I say, suppose we pull these boards over; he may have managed to convert himself into a straw and crept in between them," and by way of emphasis the speaker lifted his muscular foot and brought it down with considerable vigor on the boards, and the top board, to the astonishment of all, yielded perceptibly under the weight.

For the three to grab this and lift it up was but the work of a moment, and, lo! the hunted man laid at full length was concealed beneath it!

The pile was a sham; it was in reality a long box, the sides and ends so arranged, being small strips of wood glued together, that the most careful inspection would not detect the trick. And, if the superintendent had not by pure accident placed his foot upon the top the chances are a thousand to one that the secret hiding-place would not have been discovered and that the searchers would have retired completely baffled.

"I surrender, gentlemen!" exclaimed Lescant, rising to a sitting posture, "and I will give up the bonds, although I protest against this illegal and forcible entry into my house. Remember, gentlemen, New York is not Mexico, and the law will hold you to a strict account for this outrage."

The listeners did not know exactly what to make of this speech, and were somewhat puzzled to account for it, and as they looked at each other, questioning, Lescant got out of the box. Rising to his feet he came face to face with the chief.

"Good heavens! superintendent, is it you?" he cried, apparently recognizing the official for the first time. "Well, well, you have taken a weight off my mind. Why, do you know I thought that it was that villainous Mexican rascal, Colonel Guzman? Of course you are not acquainted with my private affairs, but for nearly five years now I have been persecuted by that scoundrel. He has attempted my life a dozen times and that is the reason why I was forced to leave Mexico and take up my residence in this country. You see, superintendent, it was all in regard to a railroad. Guzman and myself, then partners and warm personal friends, got a land-grant from the Mexican government for a railroad from the capital northward. But when we came to issue our bonds, in order to obtain capital to build our road, the colonel claimed that he, being the secretary, should negotiate the bonds; I, as president, of course laughed at the idea. In my mind there was no doubt that if anybody handled the funds accruing from the sale it should be myself. When I made this known to him he at once flew into a violent passion and declared that it was my intention, when I got the moneys in my hands, to levitate with them—to slope-skedaddle—to use your expressive Americanisms. And the moment he said this, I understood at once that this was his intention. Then there was war. He had more influence with certain officials in high offices than I, and so procured an order directing me to give up the bonds. I replied to the decree by an instant flight to the United States, bearing the bonds with me. In the courts of this country he knows that he would not be able to do anything, and so he has resorted to all sorts of devices to inveigle me into his power, that he might possess himself of the bonds, and to-night I feared that he was about to succeed, and therefore I fled, having had this hiding-place constructed expressly for use in such an emergency. Upon my word, chief, you can't imagine what a weight you have taken off my mind!"

With all the fluent, gesticulating energy of the Gallic race, Lescant had delivered the speech, but now that the superintendent had got his eyes open, he was no longer to be fooled. He brushed the flimsy explanation of the headlong flight aside without ceremony.

"Mr. Lescant, I have come on a painful errand; you are my prisoner," he remarked.

The well-acted surprise of the other was really wonderful.

"You arrest me? Impossible! Upon what charge?"

"Assault with intent to kill."

"Who is the accuser?"

Diamond removed his disguise.

"I am!" he said.

"I never saw you before in my life!"

"Be careful what you say; it will be used as evidence against you," the chief continued.

"An innocent man need not fear!" Lescant answered, proudly.

An hour later he was safe in the Tombs.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN ACCIDENT.

THANKS to the information given by Doctor Diamond, the police authorities succeeded in making one of the greatest hauls of rascals on record. Fifteen, altogether, men and women, besides the supposed chief, were taken, and all of them, with the exception of the master-mind, were well known to the officers. As the super-

intendent had expected, all the servants in the house were well-known criminals, and, as he had shrewdly calculated, the rascals had called a meeting of all the principal members of the band that evening, in order to deliberate over the situation, which they regarded as being grave in the extreme; and so it happened that the sudden swoop of the police was attended with great results.

Indeed, it really looked as if the authorities, with the one blow, had broken up the dangerous band which for so long defied the power of the police.

There was only one weak point about the matter, and that was the failure on the part of the officers to secure any proofs that would place the guilt of the members of the gang beyond the shadow of a doubt. They had expected to find something in the house itself, some stolen property, or something of that kind; or, after they had got the prisoners locked up, possibly some one of them might be induced to turn State's evidence, and "peach" on the rest.

But, so strong was the bond of union which held together this remarkable organization of outlaws, that neither threats nor persuasions could induce one of them to volunteer the least information.

In fact, they all protested, indignantly, that they knew nothing, whatever, about a secret band, and although their past lives might be of a kind that would not bear inspection, yet they had reformed, and were endeavoring to walk in the narrow path of righteousness when arrested. Of the fifteen, three women and four men claimed to be servants in the house, and really they were fulfilling such duties, as Miss Eldon testified. The other eight said they came to the house to see their former chums, now leading honest lives, with the idea that they might secure similar positions, and so escape from the unsavory sphere in which they had moved.

The White Band had been struck down by the police, but, like a gigantic cuttle-fish, each and every member was wriggling vigorously on the defensive.

Miss Eldon's testimony, which the chief, in a measure, thought he could depend upon, after he had heard her story, when closely examined did not amount to anything. She could not testify to a single thing implicating any one in the house, of a criminal act.

All the authorities had to rely upon was the evidence of Doctor Diamond. He had clearly identified Lescant as the man who had twice attempted his life—the noted leader of the White Band, but it was a serious charge to make against a man occupying so good a social position as Lescant, and, unbacked, too, by any other evidence. He and his lawyers would swear of course, that it was a case of mistaken identity, and the more the astute superintendent reflected over the matter, the more he became puzzled how to proceed.

The White Band was in his clutch, but, like an eel, it seemed likely to slip out of the dangerous position. In his own mind, the chief hadn't the least doubt but that he had got hold of the right parties, but, how to make that clear to every one, beyond the shadow of a doubt, was a puzzle. With the doctor detective he discussed the matter very carefully, and the result they arrived at was that the secret haunt of the ruffians, the old vault wherein the doctor had passed through such a perilous adventure, must be discovered as soon as possible. The rogues had been too wary to keep anything that might implicate them in their city head-quarters, but the chances were great that they had not been so careful in regard to the old vault.

So it was agreed between the two that they should take up the chase the first thing in the morning, staving off the examination of the supposed criminals in the mean time.

The doctor had abandoned his disguise, now, for he had an idea that all the desperate men of the gang were in limbo, and therefore he was in no danger of further assaults, but when he reflected about the enterprise in which he was to embark on the morrow, he concluded it was better for him to again assume it, for there was a great probability that some members of the band might be lurking in the neighborhood of their hiding-place, and it would endanger the success of their mission if he was recognized by any of them.

So, after leaving the police head-quarters he went to his lodgings and again carefully disguised himself, and then, as he did not feel any inclination to sleep, he went forth for a stroll upon upper Broadway.

Upon the corner of Thirtieth street he encountered the newsboy who figured so prominently in the early part of our tale.

With that rare thrift with which he was so eminently endowed, Hoppergrass had entered into the flower trade, as newspapers were now out of season, the sale stopping about nine, and was busily engaged in selling button-hole bouquets.

Forgetful for the moment that he was in disguise, and therefore not liable to be recognized by the boy, he accosted him.

The lad stared in amazement; gifted with wonderfully sharp ears he had recognized the

voice, but his eyes were not keen enough to penetrate the complete disguise that Diamond had assumed.

"Well, Cap, you seem to know me all right, but, blow me tight if I know you."

Diamond had addressed the boy by name.

The doctor could not forbear smiling at the puzzled look upon the shrewd little face.

"Oh, I've heered you speak afore, I am sure enough about that," the boy continued, "but I'm jiggered if I kin remember where I saw your figurehead."

"You must not betray me if I reveal my secret to you," the doctor said, confident that the boy could be trusted.

"Oh, no, honor bright!" The lad's curiosity was excited by the apparent mystery.

"I am Doctor Diamond."

"You don't say so!" cried Hoppergrass, in wonder, his eyes big with amazement. "Whv, what are you up to, anyway?"

"Nothing wrong, you may rest assured of that. I have been very busy since I first saw you or I should have hunted you up, for I had determined to see if something could not be done for you. Will you call at my house next Saturday in the afternoon, say about one o'clock."

"Yes, sir, I will be on hand."

"Don't forget, for it will be to your advantage."

"All right, boss!"

Then the doctor passed on up the street, and then a "swell" on the opposite corner across Broadway, who was rather the worse for liquor, hallooed to the boy to bring his buckets over.

The lad ran across the street, but in endeavoring to avoid an omnibus, driving at a good pace up the highway, ran in front of a carriage which whirled around the corner from the cross street just at that moment.

The driver of the vehicle saw the boy too late to save him, although he immediately pulled up his horse, but the concussion knocked Hoppergrass over and he was stunned by the shock.

The doctor, who had witnessed the occurrence, was the first to reach the lad's side, but, as he raised him in his arms, his experienced eye perceived that he was not seriously injured.

The person within the carriage, a woman, was also prompt to act. She threw the door open and cried:

"Is he dead, sir, or badly injured?"

"Neither, madam, I think; only stunned."

"Will you have the kindness to put him in the carriage, sir, and I will see that he is attended to immediately. I will take him to my home and send at once for a medical man. I am Mrs. Judge McQuencher, and I reside at No. — Madison avenue."

The woman was closely veiled, so that Diamond could not see her face, but the tones of her voice sounded so familiar that he was sure she was no stranger to him.

He placed the boy in the carriage, received the lady's card and away the vehicle went.

"Fortune is standing my friend this time," Diamond observed as he walked up the street, glancing at the card. "I wanted a chance to find out all about this Judge McQuencher and now I have secured admission into the house."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A TRACE AT LAST.

BRIGHT and early upon the following morning the doctor detective proceeded upon his mission. He retained his disguise, since, in all probability, his features were well known to nearly all of the members of the White Band, and although the greater part of the gang had been captured, yet it was likely that their secret haunt was not left unguarded; but, if he was recognized, the chances of discovering the secret of which he was in quest were greatly decreased.

Diamond, having thought the matter over carefully, had arranged a plan which he thought was likely to succeed.

He went straight down the street to the river, just as he had gone on the night when he had followed in the footsteps of the pretended sailor who had decoyed him, but when he arrived at the water-side he did not cross the street to the pier, but, turning abruptly to the right, walked on toward the north.

The doctor had reasoned in this way: he could walk about as fast as a boat could go, propelled by two oarsmen, as had been the craft in which he had been carried up the river, for he had become convinced that the course of the boat was up the stream. As near as he could calculate, the trip had occupied about an hour. Of course, bound and gagged as he had been, the time seemed twice as long, but he reasoned that, if he walked straight on for a couple of hours, following the course of the river and then halted, he would not be far from the mysterious hiding place of the secret band. But, as he turned to carry out this idea, another, and, as it seemed to him, a better scheme occurred to him. He would hire a boat and row up the river; then he would be enabled to examine both shores.

This plan he carried out at once. There were boats to let at the dock. He procured one and pushed out into the stream.

The tide was on the flood, and the doctor, who had not forgotten the boating skill which he had acquired during his college days, made good progress up the river.

He pulled away lustily for an hour and a half before he rested on his oars and began to examine the surroundings.

He had kept to the western shore, for he suspected that on that side the place he sought would be found.

As he glanced around him the first thing that met his eyes was an old fisherman busily engaged in examining some nets near the western shore.

The doctor took a good look at the weather-beaten old man, and the idea came to him that if he were to enter into conversation with the old fellow he might possibly gain some information worth knowing.

The fisherman let the nets fall again into the water, anchored his boat, took out his pipe and settled himself down for a quiet smoke while waiting for the capture of the finny prey.

Diamond rode alongside.

"May I trouble you for a light?" he asked, producing a pipe from his pocket, for Diamond was an inveterate smoker.

"Sartin," responded the old man, with a keen glance at the stranger.

"Much luck to-day?" the doctor inquired, after he had got his pipe into working order.

"None at all; fish is skeerce, worse luck."

"Is this generally a good spot?"

"None better for ten miles up or down, as I knows on."

"Are you an old hand at this business? You look like a veteran."

"Man and boy I have folloed this here river for fifty years. I reckon that I heaved a net here afore you were born."

"Well, you should be posted then, and perhaps you can give me a little bit of information about this neighborhood. I suppose that you are as well informed about the land as the water, eh?"

"Well, I don't 'actly know 'bout that," the old fellow responded, with a shake of the head. "I 'spect if you were to cipher the thing down to a fine pint you would find that since I was ten years old I have spent more time on the water than on the land, but I ain't to be fooled much 'bout either of 'em in this here neighborhood, mind ye! Take me on the land or take me on the water for twenty miles round this here identical center, and I reckon I knows it all."

"You are just the man I want, then. Do you know of a very old church in this neighborhood anywhere?"

The fisherman took a good long look at the questioner from under his bushy eyebrows before he replied.

"A werry old church," he remarked at last, slowly and with an air of deep meditation.

"Yes, a hundred years old at least, probably older than that, and with a vault underneath it."

"I don't know of no church standing round here that fills the bill."

There was a certain something in the old man's tone that Diamond's quick ears did not fail to catch.

"You know of no such building, standing?"

"That's w'at I sed."

"Do you know of any such place that is not standing—that is in ruins, maybe?"

The old fellow chuckled at being thus adroitly caught.

"Well, hang me! stranger, if you ain't the first man that ever 'tumbled' to that little 'racket' of mine. I've had a heap of people in the last forty years tried to pump me 'bout that old church, 'cos it used to be pretty well known that there was such a place, but for ten or fifteen years now the thing seems to have clean gone out of folks' heads."

"Then there is such a place?"

"Oh, yes; but there hain't been no church there for sixty odd years—not since I've known anything about it, anyway. My father said there was a church there when he was a boy, but it was all in ruins then; it is in a dre'dful lonesome spot, 'way up on top of the hill, and it's all grown up into a wood now, and all that is left of the church is a pile of rocks, overgrown with creepers, and it looks just like natur' now, you know; no one would ever think that humans had anything to do with it."

"And is there a vault underneath that used to be used as a burial-place?"

"Well, as to that, stranger, I reckon that you have got me," the fisherman replied, scratching his aged head thoughtfully. "It seems to me that I have heered tell when I was a youngster 'bout some sich place under the old ruins, but whether it is so or not, or only a story—a yarn like, you know, to make people open their eyes and stare, is more than I can tell. Anyhow, I never see'd anything of the kind, and once in a while when I was a boy a lot of us kids used to tramp up there and take a look at the thing. We didn't go very often, and only when there was a whole gang of us, for folks said that the place was haunted—ghosts, spooks and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Yes, I understand; the usual stories that are always attached to old ruins, but of course you do not believe such tales."

"Well, I don't 'xactly know," and the old fellow shook his head again in a very sagacious manner. "I tell you what it is, stranger, I don't take much stock in ghosts or things of that kind, but two or three times within the last year, when I have been coming across the river late at night, in my boat, I'll be 'tarnally smashed if I haven't seen dark figgers a-moving on the shore right under the cliff where the old ruins are, and the first time I see'd 'em I had just liquor enough on board to make me foolish, so I pulled in to the shore for to see what they was up to, and when I come close up, durned if the figgers didn't vanish right into the side of the cliff!"

The doctor, with the knowledge which he possessed, understood well enough how this had been effected, and realized that he was on the right scent.

From the old man he received instructions how to reach the ruins, and then, thanking him for his information, bent to his oars and pulled away.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

MRS. JUDGE MCQUENCHER, looking out of the carriage window, had recognized the boy when he ran across the street, and when the driver stopped so abruptly she guessed that the little fellow had been hurt. She had taken a strange interest in the little gamin, for Mrs. McQuencher was the mysterious woman who had had the strange interview with Doctor Diamond, and had been so anxious to hire Hoppergrass to play the spy upon him, and the boy's sturdy refusal only tended to make her respect the lad the more. That a street urchin should rise superior to a bribe was wonderful.

The lady made up her mind not to lose sight of him, but in her pursuit of the missing physician she had no time to think of the boy.

Little did she suspect that the man she sought, was the one who placed the boy in the carriage, so well did the doctor's disguise serve him; while he, catching but a glance at her, in the confusion of the moment, did not recognize in the lady the unknown who had made such a strange accusation against him. So the two parted, unconscious that they had ever met before.

"Stop at Doctor Dewey's house on the way home," was the lady's order to the driver.

The doctor, being at home, at once got into the carriage, and as it went on to the judge's house, examined the boy. By this time, having recovered from the shock, he was able to understand what was said to him.

"I guess that I am all right; but, crickey! what an awful crack it was! I was down under the horses' heels afore I knew what hit me. I tell you I don't want to do it again in a hurry," and a grim smile came over his dirty face.

"Do you think that you can walk, my little man?" the doctor asked.

"Oh, yes!" responded Hoppergrass, readily; but when he came to make the attempt to alight he found that he had overestimated his strength.

"John will carry you into the house!" the lady hastened to say; so the driver took the little fellow in his strong arms and carried him into the house.

Into a spare room adjoining Mrs. McQuencher's own apartment she directed that the boy should be carried.

"Pray, make a careful examination, doctor," she said, when the servant had retired.

"Do not be alarmed, my dear madam," he replied; "I do not think there is the least danger; no bones are broken, evidently."

"But may he not have sustained internal injuries?"

"I think not; about the only damage done is that when he was knocked down by the horse he got a smart rap on the head."

The doctor then unbuttoned the great-coat which the boy wore, which covered him from head to heels, and threw it open, and then, to his astonishment, discovered that it was the only garment the little fellow wore on the upper part of his body.

The lady had retired to the door when the doctor commenced his examination, but his exclamation of surprise arrested her attention.

"What is it, doctor—is he badly hurt?"

"Oh no; rather deficient in raiment; that is all."

"Don't give it away, Doc," murmured the boy.

"Perhaps he had better be undressed altogether; I will bring you a night garment for him."

And soon she returned with one of the Big Judge's night-shirts; then discreetly retreated until the doctor got his patient safe in bed. Now, as the judge was a tall and portly man, his night-shirt was a world too big for the lad, and he looked so ridiculous when incased in it that the doctor could not help laughing.

The examination showed that Hoppergrass had not sustained any damage beyond a severe

shaking up. This information he conveyed to Mrs. McQuencher, in the adjoining room.

"I am happy to say, madam, that the lad has not received any material injury—a severe concussion, that is all—a little bruised and shaken up inside; will require rest and nursing for a few days; nothing more."

"I am very glad to hear it," she remarked, earnestly, "for I take a great interest in the little fellow; he seems to be uncommonly bright—far superior to the lads of his class. It is very strange how things happen. I encountered the boy about a week ago by accident, and I became interested in him and made up my mind to inquire about and assist him if I could, but I have been busy and did not have time to attend to it."

"Fate, though, evidently intended that you should and so threw the gamin in your horse's way to-night."

"Yes, it does seem as if it was the act of a special Providence," the woman observed, thoughtfully.

"Do you know anything about him—how he is situated, whether he has any relatives or not?"

"Yes, he told me his story only a little while ago. It is simple enough; he is all alone in the world—no family or friends."

"Fine chance for you to adopt him, then," suggested the doctor, jokingly. "I suppose the judge wouldn't object. You have no children, and although upon the face of it the idea does seem absurd, yet I really think, from what little I have seen of the boy, there is the making of a fine man in him."

"I did have a child once, doctor," the lady said, and a teardrop glistened in her eye as she spoke.

"You did! Why, you really astonish me! I never heard you say anything about it before."

"Possibly you are not aware that the judge is my second husband?"

"Indeed I was not; I never heard you or any one else speak of it."

"All lives have their secrets, doctor, and that is mine. I had a child who was stolen from me when it was an infant, and if that child still lives it would be about the same age as the boy in yonder room."

"Was it a girl or boy?"

"A boy; that is why, I suppose, I am attracted to this poor little fellow, and when I look in his face it seems to me that if my boy was living he would look as this child does."

The doctor surveyed the face of Mrs. McQuencher closely for a few moments.

"Madam," he said at last, "it may be only a foolish notion, you know, or one of those strange coincidences which are continually happening, but there really is a resemblance of your face in the boy's. Had your child any birth-mark, or any other mark produced by artificial means, by which he could be identified?"

"None that I know of. Would that he had, for it would render my search the easier."

"This boy has a mark upon his person—a very peculiar mark, which is the reason I asked the question."

"My child had none; I am sure of it."

"This is not a birthmark, but one evidently placed upon the person, by design."

The woman was now deeply interested.

"I discovered this mark when I made my examination, and as it was such an odd affair I took particular notice of it," the doctor continued. "Upon the boy's right arm, pricked in in India ink, after the sailor fashion, is a device of two snakes with uplifted heads and open jaws threatening each other."

The woman sunk back in the chair, gasping for breath.

"My dear madam, what is the matter?" cried the doctor, in alarm, springing to her assistance.

"That mark was upon my first husband's arm!" she replied, as soon as she recovered from the state of agitation into which the intelligence had thrown her. "And it was he who stole the child from me."

"Possibly then he marked the child for some purpose."

"Alas, I fear that it is but accident, but to-morrow I will question the boy."

And so the interview ended.

On the morrow the judge's wife attempted to learn the truth, but the task was a hopeless one as far as the boy's knowledge was concerned. He knew nothing of his infancy beyond what he had related to her on their first meeting.

So the doubt continued. One person alone could solve the riddle; the man who had played the villain years ago. John Frenier must be found, no matter how great the cost or hazard.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AT BAY.

THE chief of police was not quite certain that he had captured all of the White Band, and therefore would have been glad to keep the matter quiet, in order to get his clutches on the rest of the gang ere they could seek safety in flight; but to keep such an important matter from the knowledge of the keen-scented reporters was altogether impossible, and so it was

that the daily journals on the morning after the successful raid contained a full account of the affair; in fact, the gentlemen of the press who "wrote up" the narrative, had not hesitated to enrich the true record with the flowers of their imaginations, and by so doing succeeded in making a really "stunning" article.

All New York gaped with wonder as they read the account, marveled at the boldness of the White Band, the sleuth-hound-like perseverance of the doctor detective and the genius of the chief of police.

Black Jack sat in his cell in the Tombs. As the reader will probably remember, this was the desperate ruffian, in whose behalf the Big Judge had spoken so strongly.

Jackson had risen from his hard couch in no very good humor that morning. He had had an interview with his lawyer during the previous afternoon, and that gentleman, had significantly told him that if he had any outside friends who could do anything for him, he had best apply to them as soon as possible; otherwise his chance of going up the river for ten or twenty years was good.

Black Jack was one of the prominent members of the White Band, and now since the legal aid which their money had procured could not save him some other way must be tried.

It was this state of things that rendered the criminal decidedly blue; and his mind was not reassured when, through the kindness of his keeper, he got hold of a morning paper and in it read the account of the capture of about all of the powerful band of criminals to which he belonged. With the destruction of the band his last hope vanished. If the leaders were in prison how could they help him?

As the felon pondered over the situation he "weakened." He could see only one chance of escaping a long term of years at Sing Sing: he would turn State's evidence, betray his companions, if the authorities agreed to deal lightly with him.

And he was in a hurry, too, to communicate this to the proper official, for the appalling thought haunted him that some one of the captured men might think of the same thing and thus forestall him.

And, just about the same time that the informer finished his recital, and the authorities were chuckling over the proof which they had secured, the Big Judge, who was a late riser as a general rule, while enjoying his elaborate breakfast, glancing at the news in the meanwhile, read the account of the capture of the White Band.

The judge was not in a good humor that morning; neither was his wife, who sat on the opposite side of the table. His surrender of the girl to her persecutor, as the madam termed Lescant, had terribly annoyed her, and there had been some very bitter words between the two, for his assertion that the law would compel the girl to go, in the long run, and that it was a great deal better to avoid a public scandal and have her go quietly in the first place, was not believed by the lady. In fact, she had asked him pointedly if the man possessed any power over him, so that he had forced him to take the course which he had taken.

The judge had flown into a terrible rage at this, and had quitted the house, declaring that he would not stay to be insulted.

Scarcely had the eyes of the judge fallen upon the staring head-lines and he had mastered their meaning, when, with a hollow groan, he sunk back in his chair.

The lady looked up in amazement; never before had she seen her husband so overcome.

"What is the matter?" she exclaimed, rising in alarm and coming around the table.

"Oh, it is nothing; a sudden spasm of pain, that's all," he replied, with a great effort to recover his self-possession. Not for the world would he have let this proud woman, whom he had married for her stately beauty, know the truth. "I have not been very well of late, and I suppose I had better see the doctor." He crumpled the newspaper up in his hand and rose from his chair as he spoke.

"But, you haven't eaten anything!"

"I've not the least appetite." And in truth that newspaper article had completely taken away all desire for food. It seemed as if another morsel would have choked him.

He dressed himself and got out of the house as soon as possible, taking care to take the paper with him. After the quarrel on Lescant's account, he did not wish his wife to learn that that gentleman had been arrested and locked up in the Tombs on the charge of being the leader of a band of criminals, whose exploits had caused a howl of rage to resound throughout the city.

By carrying off the journal he thought to keep the news from her, but, her suspicions had been excited in regard to this sudden illness. She thought it had been caused by something which he had read in the morning paper; so the moment her husband was out of the house she sent for a paper, and, of course, was soon in possession of the facts.

But, only to be more puzzled than before. Why should the judge be so excited about the

matter? What was he to Lescant, or Lescant to him?

Leaving the woman to puzzle her brains over the problem, we will follow the official.

Straight down-town he went to the office of the superintendent of police. That gentleman was "at home," and in exceedingly good spirits over the brilliant piece of work performed by his men on the previous night.

"What is this report in the morning papers about this fellow, Lescant? Is there any truth in it?" he asked, abruptly.

"Oh, yes, the reporters have elaborated the affair a little, of course, as they always do; but, in the main it is correct."

"But, by Jove! what a stupendous game this fellow has played!" the judge exclaimed. "That is, I mean, if he has played any such games as the accounts of the affair make out, about being captain of a gang, you know, and all that."

"He has played it for all it was worth, and if it had not been for this Doctor Diamond getting on his track, it might have been a long time before we could have tripped him up."

"But, have you secured legal proof sufficient for a conviction?"

"Yes, we have strong evidence; one of the gang has 'squealed,' and that will fix the whole of them."

"That is a strong point."

"You bet! But, we have only just got hold of the thread, and I intend to follow it up. I have got some information out of this informer which makes me think there are members of the gang in high places, and I'm going to do my level best to ferret them out—every soul of them!"

"You may rest assured that if any of them come before me, I will put them where they won't be apt to do any harm, for some time."

"If all the men on the bench were like you, judge, we shouldn't have so much trouble with these rascals."

The judge bowed at the compliment, and then withdrew. For all his smooth words he was greatly disturbed in his mind, and uncertain how to act.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A CAT-LIKE MAN.

IN all probability, not many readers have explored the gloomy recesses of the massive pile in Center street, New York, known far and wide as the Tombs prison. But, those who have, most certainly have been impressed with the idea that the unfortunates who passed within the portals of the Egyptian-like edifice, might exclaim with Dante, "All ye that enter here, leave hope behind!"

So strong the prison walls and bars, so careful and complete the watch, that for a prisoner to escape, when once fairly within its confines, seems well-nigh impossible.

And yet, criminals have escaped from the Tombs; some by ingenuity and skill, and others by bribing the men paid to keep watch and ward.

Lescant was regarded as an important prisoner, and the Tombs warden was warned to keep a careful eye upon him. Not that the authorities thought he would make a desperate effort to escape, for they regarded him as the head who planned, rather than as one of the hands who executed; and now that they had got him safely lodged in jail, together with the greater part of the band, it seemed as if the decisive blow ought to paralyze the gang.

But, despite bolts and bars, the watchful warden and ever-vigilant keepers, Lescant did escape; but when, or by what means, no man could tell. It was suspected that, having been provided with false keys by a confederate, he had contrived to unlock the door of his cell, then had slipped out into the corridor; a disguise—probably a light overcoat, wig and whiskers, was in readiness, and thus equipped and provided with a forged pass, he had succeeded in passing the door-keeper, and had got off without detection.

Of course there was a great outcry when this escape was discovered, and the police authorities were convinced that some one of the Tombs officials must have been in league with the prisoner, for otherwise he could not possibly have got out.

A searching examination followed, but nothing of value resulted. The prisoner was gone; no one knew how, and there was the end of it. Not the slightest clew did he leave behind him any more than if he had flown up into the air like a bird, or sunk down through the earth like a specter.

But we, using the novelist's privilege, can easily trace the footsteps of the man fleeing for dear life.

Although Lescant had succeeded in obtaining his liberty, the White Band was destroyed; too many of its members had been caught in the haul of the police net; the evidence against them was too strong and conclusive for any hope that they might escape the meshes of the law.

Lescant's first idea was to brave the matter

out—to swear that it was all a mistake, and that he knew nothing of the character of the people whom the police captured in his house; but, when he came to think the matter over, quietly and calmly in the solitude of his dungeon cell, he saw that the position was not strong enough to make a successful fight. The end had come, and flight alone was left. So he fled. He was aided by an official inside the great prison. What, to this venal creature, was fidelity to his duties compared to a thousand dollars, cash in hand, paid down on the nail, for conniving at the escape?

Lescant made his way at once to the secret hiding-place of the White Band, the old vault under the ruins of the ancient chapel by the banks of the Hudson, only stopping on the way to indite a letter to the judge.

The fugitive reached his hiding-place without difficulty; but an hour later, after his disappearance had been discovered, it would have been a difficult matter, for the chief of police, terribly annoyed that his prey should have slipped through his fingers so easily, took measures to "cover" every avenue of escape leading from the city. But, the precaution was taken too late; the bird had already won its freedom.

Lescant found the vault deserted; it was a part of his policy not to have the secret hiding-place occupied any more than could be helped, so as to lessen the danger of discovery.

Very few of the band had escaped the police raid, but, as luck would have it, two of the most important members, although not very active ones generally, had been fortunate enough not to have been in the house when the descent was made upon it, and one of these two was the agent who effected the chief's escape.

It was the Jew, whose voice Doctor Diamond had recognized when in the power of the band on the memorable night when he had been doomed to death. This man kept a large second-hand store on the corner of the avenue from which came the cross-street on which the doctor lived. His brother was the man who had died, attended by Diamond, and who was supposed to have betrayed the secret of the band to him. The Hebrew, with all the cunning of a Vidocq, had managed the escape, and now was in the city, striving to find out what steps were being taken for the recapture of the captain.

When Lescant arrived at the vault, he first proceeded to light one of the torches and then examined the place carefully in order to be sure that no one of the band was lurking nigh. Satisfied on this point, his next movement was to prepare for the journey which he was about to undertake. The outlaw chief, in contemplation of just such an untoward event as had happened, had made careful provision. In a secure hiding-place he had laid away a goodly store of gold; also a most complete disguise. This he assumed, and then carefully stowed the money away upon his person.

"There," he muttered, when this was accomplished; "now I am prepared to seek seclusion in some other land for a while, until this infernal affair blows over. I was right about that Doctor Diamond; the very first time I ever set eyes upon him, I became impressed with the conviction that he was destined to cause me trouble. It is strange how true these apprehensions are, sometimes."

After completing his preparations the fugitive sat down to wait; he expected a visitor, but was uncertain at what time he would arrive. Not until after dark, at any rate.

This surmise was correct, for it was about eight o'clock when the little bell scudded which was the signal that some one had passed into the underground passage which led from the vaulted chamber to the river.

A cunningly-contrived door was at the end of this passage, and it was so arranged that when it was opened the bell within the inner chamber rung.

Soon the new-comer stepped from the shadows of the narrow passage into the little circle of light cast by the torch. It was the Big Judge!

McQuencher's face was deadly pale, and it was evident that he was in a great state of nervous excitement.

"Sit down, sit down, judge!" Lescant exclaimed, in his cool, off-hand way, motioning him to one of the tombstones which the band had utilized as seats. "What is the matter with you? You are as pale as a ghost!"

"Oh, this infernal affair!" groaned the judge, plainly in great agony of mind.

"Yes, they have busted our bank this time, but, although they contrived to put a yoke on my neck, the bird was too sharp for them, in the long run."

"What do you intend to do now?"

"Get out of the country as soon as possible and wait abroad until this affair is forgotten."

"Oh, it will never be forgotten!"

"Yes, it will; in a couple of years no one will remember it at all. This is a fast country, and events come too quick on each other's heels for any one affair to linger long in the memory."

"But is it over yet?" the Big Judge asked, a

prey to piteous fear. "I tremble in every limb for fear my connection with the band may be discovered. Just think, it would be utter ruin. I should never survive the disclosure; most surely I should take my own life."

"Oh, what nonsense!" Lescant cried. "Why, man-alive, this is not the only country in the world; there are others as fair to live in. I have made myself at home in my time in a dozen different lands, and under a dozen different names, too. And, as to this blowing over, why, twenty-five years ago I was mixed up in one, right in this city, almost as bad, and was compelled to fly; and then, about eleven years ago I was obliged to get out at my best speed or else I should have had to do the State some service; and I was on the eve of making a fortune, too, and should, if I could have persuaded a foolish woman to hold her tongue and play the part which I had assigned to her; but, women will be women, and there was no reasoning with Madam Frenier."

A shrill cry in a woman's voice startled both of the men to their feet, and from the narrow passage into the great vault came Mrs. Judge McQuencher! Her eyes were blazing and her whole form quivering with excitement.

Lescant guessed the truth, at once, in regard to the woman's presence. In some way she had ascertained that the judge was about to pay a secret visit, and having become suspicious had followed him. The judge in his nervous excitement had neglected to close the outside door after him; so she had been able to gain admittance to the passage without exciting alarm.

"You are John Frenier!" the woman cried, never heeding her husband, but confronting the chief of the White Band.

He was astounded, for it was evident that she knew him; and now for the first time the knowledge of who she was began to dawn upon him. She had changed much in the lapse of years, and from a slender, fragile girl had grown into a tall and stately woman.

"And you are Elvira Hollender!" he answered.

"You are right!"

"You are wonderfully changed."

"But, not so much as you. I did not expect to see you looking so old. There is hardly a resemblance in your face to the man whom I once knew. But, enough of this idle talk; you know what I seek. Will you repair the wrong you did years ago? Will you speak so that I can carry to the anxious mother tidings of her child?"

"No, I will not," Lescant or Frenier, whatever his name was, replied, in a dogged and determined manner. "The woman of whom you speak chose to set up her will against mine; I was on the point of grasping a fortune; she prevented me from so doing, and in revenge I stole the child away. It was my child, and I had as much right to it as any one."

"But, you never cared for the poor little helpless thing; you were cruel, merciless! You stole the child away solely that you might wring the heart of the mother."

"Quite right! She baffled me, defeated my plan, and so I revenged myself."

"And where is the child?"

"Upon my word I cannot tell you."

"Is it alive or dead?"

"I know absolutely nothing in regard to it. I did not care what became of the cub; so I gave it to an old Irishwoman to rear as her own, and I agreed to pay fifty dollars a year for three years. The first fifty I paid in advance, and then, having got the child off my hands, I never troubled my head about the matter."

"Tell me the name of the woman and where she lived. Even now it may not be too late to ascertain the truth!"

"I have forgotten it," Lescant answered, with a mocking smile, which belied his words.

"Oh, you are a devil!" the woman cried, in utter despair.

"You are not the first woman in this world who has told me that," the other retorted, in the calmest manner possible. "I remember one, twenty odd years ago whom I was obliged to leave, and for the same cause for which I left the woman of whom you have spoken, but the first was keener-witted than the second, and she did not allow me to steal her baby away. She penetrated my design and declared she would rear the boy herself and make an honest man of him, and perhaps the time might come when he upon the judge's seat would pass sentence upon his guilty father. You see what a romantic, fanciful creature she was in that respect, and yet she was a plain, simple little woman—one Laura Jewel by name."

"Oh, man, have mercy upon the mother in whose name I speak!" the woman implored.

"I tell you I have forgotten all about it, and I have such a peculiar memory that I am quite sure nothing would be apt to make me remember."

"Let me try my skill," said a cold, stern voice.

All started in surprise, and then from the dark mouth of the narrow passage out into the vault came the tall dark figure of the Doctor Detective!

CHAPTER XL. JUSTICE.

A CRY of mingled rage and despair came from the lips of Lescant. He guessed that he was entrapped for he feared the officers were without.

In haste he drew a revolver from his pocket; but Diamond, prepared for such an action, held a cocked six-shooter in his right hand and by simply raising it held the other at his mercy.

"Put up your weapon!" he exclaimed, sternly, "unless you wish to die upon the spot."

Lescant, with all his coolness and courage, was not the man to court death while a chance for life remained, so he obeyed and replaced the pistol in his pocket.

"The trick is yours again, I suppose," he remarked, with bitter accent. "I presume the police are within call."

"You are right; they are. The bolt which you aimed at me has fallen upon your own head. If you had not attempted to compass my death—if you had not brought me into this place and attempted to entomb me alive in the golden coffin, you would not have placed me upon your track, and even if the detectives had by accident discovered your secret, this place would have afforded you a secure refuge. You would not believe me when I declared to you that I did not know your secret, and that the one confided to me by the dying man had nothing to do with your band. I would not betray what had been confided to my care, for it was a sacred trust; and then, too, I knew that it would be useless, for I should not have been believed. The dying man had wronged a widow and her orphans, and he directed me how to make restitution. That was all. But you were determined in your purpose, and this is the result. Both the entrances to this place are guarded, the trap-door leading through the ruins above and this passage to the river through which I came. All I have to do is to call and you will be in the hands of the police."

"And why do you not? Why do you hesitate? Is it to play with me as a cat does with a mouse? Does that add to your triumph?" cried Lescant, in impotent anger.

"You said your memory was so bad that you could not give this lady the information she seeks. I am a doctor and it is my business to cure such things. I think I can make you remember."

"How—what do you offer?" demanded the other, catching eagerly at the chance.

"Liberty!"

Lescant started and his breath came hard and fast.

"For Heaven's sake don't jest with the man whom you have crushed helpless beneath your feet!" he exclaimed.

"I do not jest. Give this lady the information she wishes and you shall go free. The police without will not enter until I signal them. No one but myself knows that you are here. You are disguised, and I will conduct you through the line; a boat is on the shore; once in it in the darkness of the night which overhangs the river no one will see you and you can easily escape."

"Why do you do this?" asked Lescant, suspiciously. "Why should you favor me, the man who attempted your life?"

"Am I not at present your judge? Is it not my privilege to dispose of your fate?"

"But, are you honest—are you not tricking me to my death?"

"I give you my word as an honest man you shall go free, and, what is more, I will not inform any one that you were here."

"It is a bargain; I accept!" Lescant cried, his spirits rising at this unexpected happening. Then, from his memorandum-book which he took from his breast-pocket, he tore out a leaf, which he handed to Diamond. "There is a full account of the matter written down. I put it on paper as I had an idea that it might be useful some time."

The doctor read the account carefully, then folded it up and gave it to the judge's wife.

"Now follow me," he commanded.

"Ta, ta, judge; I'll see you again, some time," Lescant remarked, all his old light-heartedness returning now that he seemed likely to get off, scot-free.

The Big Judge only groaned and covered his face with his hands as if to shut out the sight of the man who had tempted him to crime.

Lescant left the vault, following in the footsteps of the doctor without taking the slightest notice of the woman whom he had once wronged so terribly, for, I presume the careful reader has penetrated the thin disguise assumed by Mrs. McQuencher, and understands that she was the mother of the child and the victim of this arch rogue.

Not a soul was visible when the two men reached the open air. The police were near at hand but carefully concealed, and warned not to advance until Diamond signaled them, for, although the doctor had been sure that the fugitive would seek the shelter of the cave, yet, when he arrived on the spot he had not been certain the chief of the band was in the vault.

The doctor conducted Lescant to the boat which was drawn up on the beach and assisted him to push it into the water.

Lescant got into the boat.

"One last question," he said, as he stood up in the boat, oar in hand, ready to push off. "I am no fool; neither are you one. There is some motive in this deed to-night; why do you let me go free?"

"Laura Jewel told you that your son whom you, like the guilty coward that you are, deserted, might, when grown to manhood, sit in judgment upon you, and she reared the boy with that idea, but begged him to temper justice with mercy. 'Give him one chance to reform, but one chance only,' she said. On my right arm are blazoned the two serpents entwined as on yours. My right name is Alcenor Jewel."

"Great heavens, my son!" cried the felon, in amazement.

"The woman whom you so cruelly wronged years ago has saved you this night. Fate decreed that I should be your judge. I have spared you; go, and sin no more."

For a moment the other hesitated as if about to reply, and then, without a single word pushed out into the stream, sat down and bent to the oars.

The man was a thorough rascal; he was all bad; no thoughts of repentance were in his mind; he only chuckled at getting off so easily.

He rowed away lustily, and muttered to himself as he made his way out into the stream through the inky darkness of the night. A single light shining like a star upon the opposite shore was all he had to guide him.

"The mother lives again in him! No wonder I hated him! No wonder I had a presentiment that he was destined to be dangerous. But, it is all over, now. I have enough money to give me a good start in some other land; but, to turn honest! oh, no! I am too old for any such foolishness. Money I must have, and I can get it far easier by foul than by fair means. Justice! bah! I laugh at such a thing! Providence! It is a trick to frighten simple men."

And then, as if Fate had heard the boast and resented it with a buffet, a dark mass came crashing into the frail craft wherein the fugitive sat, crushing it as if it had been an egg-shell.

A large schooner heavily laden had run into the boat, never noticing it in the deep darkness.

Lescant was hurled into the water; he was an expert swimmer—this man was a master of almost everything—but the large store of gold which he had upon his person weighted him down.

Vainly he struggled; it was not in the sinews of mortal man to swim with such a weight.

The gold—his ill-gotten gains carried him beneath the wave; a few trembling air-bubbles ascended and justice was done.

The chief of the White Band would never trouble this world more.

But few more words remain to be said. The secret of Lescant's death the river kept securely, and all believed that he had managed to escape from the country.

The Big Judge never recovered from the shock which the capture of his criminal associates gave him. He took to his bed and within three days was a dead man.

Our readers of course, long ere this, have understood that fate had chosen to bring together the long-separated mother and son in a very strange manner, and that, when the judge's wife, impelled by her kind heart, gave shelter to the injured little Hoppergrass, she took within her doors her own son. On the page of the memorandum-book which Lescant had surrendered were inscribed the full particulars attending the bestowal of the boy to the old Irishwoman's care, her name and abode; also a description of the peculiar design which Lescant, in his caprice, had pricked upon the right arm of the infant—the two serpents coiled together with uplifted heads. So there was a bright future in store for our honest and fearless little street vagabond.

And now that his task was finished, and the secret band hunted down, the doctor turned his attention to the girl who had won his heart at the first glance. It was a mutual passion, and soon Dura became his wife.

The golden coffin alone remains. The odd casket was a crazy idea of a well-to-do man to rob his heirs. No one knew of it, but all supposed that it was lead, from its weight, but after the death and a vast sum of money was *non est*, much wonder was excited as to what had become of it. Lescant, always quick, concluded that the old man had secreted his gold in the coffin, and so, with his gang, had robbed he graveyard one night. The golden coffin was secured, but, after it was got, it puzzled the robbers how to turn it to account. In one of his mad freaks Lescant determined to bury the doctor in it, and from the chain of circumstances which arose thereby, it may safely be said that to the golden coffin the White Band was indebted for its destruction by the Doctor Detective.

THE END.

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